Encountering Eucharistic Presence Within a Postmodern Context: A Dialogue Among Chauvet, Schmemann and Zizioulas

Jason Gary DelVitto

Follow this and additional works at: https://dsc.duq.edu/etd

Recommended Citation

This Immediate Access is brought to you for free and open access by Duquesne Scholarship Collection. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Duquesne Scholarship Collection.
ENCOUNTERING EUCHARISTIC PRESENCE WITHIN A POSTMODERN CONTEXT: A DIALOGUE AMONG CHAUVET, SCHMEMANN AND ZIZIOULAS

A Dissertation
Submitted to the School of Theology
McAnulty College & Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By
Jason Gary DelVitto

May 2013
Copyright by
Jason Gary DelVitto

2012
ENCOUNTERING EUCHARISTIC PRESENCE WITHIN A POSTMODERN CONTEXT: A DIALOGUE AMONG CHAUVE, SCHMEMANN AND ZIZIOULAS

By

Jason Gary DelVitto

Approved February 13, 2013

George S Worgul, Ph.D.
Professor of Theology
(Committee Chair)

Fr. Radu Bordeianu, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Theology
(Committee Member)

Fr. Sebastian Madathummuriyil, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Theology
(Committee Member)

James C. Swindal, Ph.D.
Dean, McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts
Professor of Philosophy

Maureen O’Brien, Ph.D.
Chair, Department of Theology
Associate Professor of Theology
ABSTRACT

ENCOUNTERING EUCHARISTIC PRESENCE WITHIN A POSTMODERN CONTEXT:
A DIALOGUE AMONG CHAUVET, SCHMEMANN AND ZIZIOULAS

By
Jason Gary DelVitto
May 2013

Dissertation supervised by Professor George Worgul

The Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Churches, as well as other Christian communities, are faced with the challenges of postmodern thought, which calls into question some of the foundational theological and philosophical constructs through which Christianity has articulated the mystery of Eucharistic presence. Louis-Marie Chauvet, Alexander Schmemann and John Zizioulas, the interlocutors presented in this dissertation, recognize that for centuries, Eucharistic theology has been shaped within a metaphysical/Scholastic framework which confines, in many respects, the experiential/relational aspects of the divine/human dynamic as mediated in the Eucharistic celebration. An appeal for a paradigmatic shift is made evident in their respective works based on a renewed understanding of the various strata of the symbolic order and the paradigm of relationality as being the primary contexts within which the people of God celebrate his presence. This shift is necessary in order to correct the
problematic of a causal, mechanistic, reductionist, overly-metaphysical, dualist framework as well as a static onto-theological construct, to which Eucharistic theology has been subjected to for centuries. There is a call for a re-thinking of Eucharistic presence in light of a theology which is rooted in the mutually supportive principles of *lex orandi est lex credendi* and of a Patristic theological landscape.

The methodology of this dissertation is comparative and dialogical in nature in which each theologian articulates the need for a scholarship of Eucharistic presence to be established on new terrain and a new trajectory which will prove to be more appropriate in expressing the mystery of presence as it is grounded and expressed within the Apostolic faith and practice.

By appealing to and implementing the theologies here presented, we can develop a renewed vision of Eucharistic presence that may provide a common ground for an ecumenical enterprise, reaffirming the most essential component of faith: God’s presence among humanity and in creation. This ecumenical enterprise must not remain within the realm of the abstract or theoretical, but needs to culminate in a true union of the churches born of a common unity in faith and eventual Eucharistic practice. In addition, these three theologians’ contributions will continue to provide contemporary and future scholars in sacramental theology with an innovative approach to further articulate the mystery of presence through media which speak to the contemporary world while remaining rooted in antiquity.
DEDICATION

To my beloved wife Anna, our sons Gregory, Steven, daughter-in-law Shadia and Daniel, who reveal to me how to celebrate life in Godly love and joy
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to offer my deepest and most sincere gratitude to all who have contributed in assisting and guiding me throughout the years in the research and writing of this dissertation. I am most grateful to Dr. George Worgul, my instructor, director and reader of my dissertation, and Dr. William Thompson-Uberuaga, both of whom exhibited unwavering patience and support in my efforts to produce this work and who continue to remain an inspiration to me in all that I do.

I would also like my readers, Dr. Radu Bordeianu and Dr. Sebastian Madathamumriyil for their theological expertise, guidance and assistance that they afforded me. Also, I would like to thank all of my past professors at Duquesne University, especially Dr. James P. Hanigan and Dr. Michael Slusser, as well as the staff members of the Theology Department, especially Dr. Maureen O'Brien and Dr. Marie Baird for their assistance as well as Linda L. Rendulic, Assistant to the Dean, McAnulty Graduate School of Liberal Arts.

I am particularly grateful to the faculty and staff of St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary, most especially, to Fr. Alexander Schmemann of blessed memory. Fr. Alexander’s presence during my years at St. Vladimir’s, especially within the prayer life as celebrated in the seminary’s Three Hierarchs Chapel, opened to me and to all at the seminary a new horizon of what it means to celebrate the Divine Liturgy and to be thankful for and open to the depth and beauty of what it means to worship God in Spirit.
and in Truth. It is Fr. Alexander’s work that inspired me to do this dissertation. To his legacy of theology as worship, we are all most thankful. Also, I would like to thank Fr. Thomas Hopko for his continued encouragement and theological expertise which proved most beneficial to me. I am deeply thankful for the support that I received from Dr. John Boojamra of blessed memory, who as my instructor and friend gave his utmost support.

My gratitude is extended to Fr. Alexander Atty, Dean Emeritus, St. Tikhon’s Orthodox Theological Seminary, for his years of sincere friendship, support and encouragement not only within the world of academia but most especially in our shared lives in pastoral work. I am deeply indebted to Mr. Paul Abernathy for his continued support and assistance throughout this endeavor.

I am grateful to Fr. John Petro, Fr. Joseph Raptosh, Academic Dean of SS. Cyril and Methodius Byzantine Catholic Seminary of Pittsburgh, whose theological acumen proved most helpful to me throughout the years, as well as the faculty and staff of the seminary whose encouragement is deeply appreciated, most notably Dr. Sandra Collins and Sr. Margaret Ann Andrako. I am also thankful to Fr. George Yatsko who faithfully kept me aware of the importance of theological work and completing my dissertation.

I extend my sincere appreciation to Mrs. Ardella Crawford who edited my work with the greatest care and expertise.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ABSTRACT</th>
<th>iv</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE: HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN CONCEPTS OF EUCHARISTIC PRESENCE</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mystery of the Eucharistic Presence</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Parousaic and Eschatological Dimension of the Eucharistic Presence in Early Christianity</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Eucharistic Presence in Scripture and Patristic Literature</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shifts in Understanding Regarding the Eucharist</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Impact of the Christological Controversies Regarding the Eucharistic Vision</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Eucharistic Presence in Medieval Theology</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reformation Challenges to Eucharistic Doctrines</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the Eucharistic Presence in the Post-modern World</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Ecclesial Body: The Remedy for Individualism</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Patristic Understanding of the Symbol and the World as Sacrament in Chauvet and Schmemann</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Eucharist as the Ground of Unity Between Catholic and Orthodox</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO: CHAUVEIT ON THE EUCHARISTIC PRESENCE</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theology Within the “Old” Metaphysical Framework</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Logical Presuppositions of Scholasticism</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chauvet’s Critique of Metaphysics as Onto-Theology and Call for a New Horizon.. 79
Chauvet’s Appeal to Heidegger’s Notion of Being..................................................... 79
Applying Chauvet’s Foundational Concepts to Eucharistic Presence .................. 86
Sacramental Presence and Absence in the Eucharistic Celebration....................... 86
The Crucified One as Wholly “Other” ................................................................. 91
The Community of Faith: Ecclesia as the Setting for Eucharistic Experience and Faith ................................................................................................................. 97
Regaining the Meaning of the Symbol and the Symbolic Order ....................... 105

CHAPTER THREE: THE SACRAMENTAL WORLDVIEW OF ALEXANDER

SCHMEMANN ........................................................................................................ 124

Key Elements of the Liturgical and Sacramental Crisis .................................... 129
Methodologies: Contributing to the Crisis ......................................................... 130
The Compromise in the Principle of “Lex Orandi est Lex Credendi” and Its
Consequences ........................................................................................................ 134
Loss of the Experiential Nature of Liturgy ......................................................... 138
The Decline of Ecclesiology ................................................................................ 139
The Institutionalization of the Church ................................................................. 141
New Directions From Schmemann’s Theology ................................................. 144
Restoring the Symbol: A New Light on the Eucharist ................................. 148
The Challenge of Liturgical/Illustrative Symbolism in the Eastern Liturgical
Experience ............................................................................................................. 154
Restoring the Experiential Nature of the Liturgy .......................................... 162
The World as Sacrament ...................................................................................... 164
The Pneumatological and Eschatalogical Dimensions of the Eucharist ...................... 178

CHAPTER FOUR: JOHN D. ZIZIOULAS AND THE RELATIONAL CHARACTER OF PERSONHOOD: IMPLICATIONS FOR AN UNDERSTANDING OF EUCHARISTIC PRESENCE .................................................................................................................. 192

Trinitarian Life as Relationship: The Trinitarian Ontology of Personhood .......... 199

Human Personhood: Created in God’s Image ....................................................... 206

The Human Person: Ekstasis and Hypostasis ..................................................... 212

The Solution for Radical Individualism .............................................................. 220

From Biological to Ecclesial Existence: The “Catholic Person” ...................... 223

CHAPTER FIVE: SEEKING A COMMON TABLE: UNITY IN THE EUCHARIST 239

Current Obstacles to Union .................................................................................. 242

Converging Views Toward a Common Vision of Eucharistic Presence: Symbolization and Inter-subjectivity as Key Elements of Eucharistic Presence .................................................. 251

The Rehabilitation of the Person as a Free Subject in a Relationship .............. 263

Presence in Conversation with Experience: The Multidimensional Character of Presence Operative within a Renewed Vision ............................................................ 267

Renewing the Eucharistic Vision ......................................................................... 277

A United Witness for Postmodern Humanity ...................................................... 278

The Shape of a Future Theology of Presence ...................................................... 284

Concluding Thoughts: The Shape of the Reconciliation of the Churches via a Common Eucharistic Vision ................................................................................................................. 285

BIBLIOGRAPHY ..................................................................................................... 293
CHAPTER ONE: HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN CONCEPTS OF EUCHARISTIC PRESENCE

Today, the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches are faced with the challenges and rigorous critiques of postmodern\(^1\) thought, which calls into question the meaning of Eucharistic theology. Over the centuries the theological and philosophical constructs used to articulate this theology have arisen out of worldviews that may no longer be relevant to the postmodern mind. Roman Catholic and Orthodox theologians alike are asking essential questions: How can these churches articulate the mystery of the Eucharistic presence of Christ within a post-modern context? How do these churches dialogue with contemporary philosophies and sciences? What do these churches need to do to resonate meaningfully with modern people? What does each church need to preserve in order to remain faithful to its theological tradition? All of these are asked in the context of what is arguably a more urgent question: How may these churches find the road to unity in order to give a united witness to the healing presence of Christ in a fragmented world?

\(^1\) The terms \textit{postmodern, postmodernism}, etc., remain quite fluid and somewhat elusive. No universally definitive criteria have been set forth in determining the nature and purpose of postmodern thought, leaving room for theological and philosophical creativity. Despite the questionable nature of the term, certain trends and methods in postmodern thought cannot be merely dismissed. Postmodern thought, while founded on philosophical principles engaged within a theological construct, causes us to rethink the traditional language of, for example, the sacramental nature of the Church as it has been expressed from the scholarship of the Middle Ages to the present. A significant influence on postmodern thought is the principle of deconstructionism (Derrida): i.e., the re-evaluation of assumed presuppositions regarding, for example, eucharistic notions of presence, which developed within the framework of Scholastic theology. Characteristic of this approach is the deconstruction of the multitude of layers of philosophical/theological constructs inherited from the past and now being re-valuated through a return to the “original sources”—in our case, the patristic mind and the critical principle of \textit{lex orandi est lex credendi}. In addition to these concerns, is the need for a rediscovery of the transcendent nature of Christian experience and worship which, from the Middle Ages, has seen a lacuna between God and the created order. For an additional insight to some of the characteristics of postmodern thought, cf. Sebastian Madathummuriyil, \textit{Sacrament as Gift: A Pneumatological and Phenomenological Approach} (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), 41-47. See also John D. Caputo, \textit{God, the Gift, and Postmodernism} (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1999).
In addressing these issues and in an attempt to offer insight on theological Eucharistic discourse, this dissertation will examine Eucharistic theology from the perspective of the Eucharistic presence. Over the centuries, the Orthodox did not experience the same need to develop an understanding of the Eucharistic presence that was found in the West. The debates in Western Christianity arose primarily from the challenges brought on by the Reformers and created a Eucharistic discourse within the Catholic church relative to the real or “symbolic” nature of the Eucharistic gift. Even so, both churches hold the Eucharist to be the “sacrament of sacraments” as the culmination of Christian expression and experience. Thus, it may be fruitful to explore and address the continuing dialogue between the Orthodox and Catholic churches from the perspective of Eucharistic presence in the context of the postmodern challenge.

This dissertation focuses on the theological work of Chauvet, Schmemann, and Zizioulas in relation to the Eucharist by understanding their thought, recognizing their contributions, pointing out their uniqueness, and synthesizing their distinct approaches in an attempt to establish a dialogue of Eucharistic theology between the Orthodox and Catholic churches. Each of these three voices reflects its respective tradition and bears credible witness to the ongoing development of Eucharistic theology in post-modern times. All three thinkers are deeply rooted in the Patristic mind² of the church yet engaged in the here-and-now context of contemporary existential-relational culture.

² By the term, “patristic mind,” I refer to the complex of experiential faith, both *theoria and praxis*, of the Fathers/Doctors of the Church, both East and West. Both Churches are patristically minded in that theologians of each tradition cite the critical importance of the patristic character of the church. This patristic character is indigenous to the Church itself as a sustaining and viable reference for maintaining an authentic expression of Christian theology. John Meyendorff queries, “In what sense, therefore, is the Church ‘patristic’? On the one hand, it is committed to the truth which the Fathers preserved in their
Each of these theologians recognizes that, during the long and sometimes tumultuous history of the church in addressing Eucharistic theory and practice, such a history is replete with shifting ideologies and practices. Eucharistic theology has been shaped by a variety of scriptural and philosophical genres that have governed Eucharistic thought in any given age. In this first chapter, I will identify and analyze these shifts to gain a fundamental understanding of the Eucharist against the background of history. If we explore the development of Eucharistic history and address the various conditions that have brought the Church to its current Eucharistic consciousness, doing so will help us to discover how we may articulate a Eucharistic theology and practice that is relevant to the current existential-personal mind-set of contemporary culture, while at the same time remaining faithful to the common Tradition of the Roman and Orthodox Churches. We must remember that the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches enjoyed a union in faith, a shared ecclesiological vision, and many common practices, bound by a common belief for over a thousand years. In addition, both Churches piously share a common conviction that the Eucharistic celebration is the “Sacrament of sacraments.” With this

struggles, and there is no way in which that truth can be known and understood except by entering the ‘mind’ of the Fathers, becoming their contemporaries in spirit and, therefore, allowing oneself to become as Greek as they were. Being ‘patristic,’ therefore, does not mean that one simply repeats their formulae and their ideas: indeed, consistency—i.e., the true content of the Holy Tradition—is not identical with repetition. Faithfulness to the Fathers—who spoke to Greeks and converted the Greeks to the great truths of the gospel—requires that we speak to our contemporaries and convert them. John Meyendorff, Catholicity and the Church (Crestwood, NY:SVS Press, 1997), 47.

understanding in mind, we now turn to a short exploration of how these two traditions understand the mystery of the Eucharist.\(^4\)

The Mystery of the Eucharistic Presence

In the beginning, we must understand certain presuppositions regarding the dynamic between the transcendent and the immanent within the human experience of the Eucharist. Hugh Wybrew offers a description of how the Eucharist was regarded in early Christianity, a definition that has not changed throughout the centuries:

The early Christians, celebrating the Eucharist, looked both forward and backward: backward to the cross, whose memorial they were making, and forward to the second coming, which they eagerly awaited. Yet that does not adequately represent the significance of the Eucharist. The memorial, or anamnèsis, of Christ made with bread and cup was less a looking back to past event than a making present of that event here and now. The early Eucharist was no memorial service for the dead founder of the community. When thanks were given over bread and cup, and when the community ate and drank, the crucified and risen Christ was invisibly among them, present no longer in the flesh but in

\(^4\) Any discussion of the Eucharist of necessity involves treatment of the nature of being, for which the three theologians included in this dialogue use the word *ontology*. Some Orthodox theologians have avoided the use of this term, but such an aversion is usually only to a certain sense of the word. In employing this term in my dissertation, I distinguish between the Hellenistic/Scholastic understanding and use of the term, and that of my three interlocutors. The Hellenistic idea of ontology, as employed within that philosophical system, refers to a static ontology in that the notion of *ontos* was not thought to carry a dynamic, personal/relational sense. Being, in general terms, was viewed as a fixed reality, a closed system confined to the cosmic order. The Christian fathers, especially the Cappadocians, having the revelation of the Trinity, who abandoned this model of a static ontology in the philosophical world and placed it in existentialist framework of relationality, i.e. personhood. By doing this, the fathers were able to set the notion of ontology on a new trajectory, which was rooted in the dynamism of relationality as most superlatively expressed within the life of the Trinity.
the Spirit. Had he not said, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt.28:20)? Nor was the second coming a remote future event. Christ was not absent from them, he was present with them; and where he was, there was the Kingdom of God. The Eucharist was a foretaste of that Kingdom.5

For the early Christians the celebration of the Eucharist was both transcendent and immanent. It was the experience of the Risen Christ in the Spirit, through worship. The issue at stake for these early Christians was how the risen Christ could be experienced as being dead and alive, as one who is present, yet one who is to come on that great day, both transcendent and immanent. The Patristic writings speak of the Eucharistic experience being in the Kingdom through Christ, who is himself the Kingdom of God. Karl Rahner speaks of this relational, transcendence-immanence paradigm: “We are now beings oriented to the future: we are eschatological in our very being itself.”6 Undoubtedly, the rumblings of the ancient Christian experience of the Eucharist echo down to the theology of our day; yet it needs to be transformed into a full voice for modern theology.

The presence of the risen Christ, as experienced and articulated by people of faith in the celebration of the Eucharist, is foundational to proclaiming the salvific work of


God. Particularly and uniquely through the Eucharistic celebration, the theological and spiritual framework of humanity’s encounter with God reveals a God who remains faithful to his people. Is this not the God who established covenant with His creation? Does not this covenant reveal a God who is love? Does not this God embrace the created order which He created \textit{ex nihilo}? Further, does not this God who brings the creation into being, through the work of His Son, call the creation and its inhabitants “very good,” as deemed by God in their genesis, and as worthy to be transformed into the very means by which we commune with the living God? Such a broad understanding of the world was normative for the early Christians; it is what Karl Rahner points to when he speaks of humanity as eschatological beings, and the contemporary Orthodox perspective is no less descriptive and normative.

On the part of the members of the Eucharistic assembly, their participation in the offering of Christian Sacrifice is a dynamic, interpersonal reality that begins with the self-offering response of the Son in his humanity to the Father and for us, and then, finally, becomes the “Christian sacrifice” when the Christians themselves, in the power of the same Spirit that was in Jesus, are transformatively (at least inchoatively) taken up into the Trinitarian reality.\footnote{Robert J. Daly, “Eucharistic Origins: From the New Testament to the Liturgies of the Golden Age,” \textit{Journal of Theological Studies}, 66, no. 1 (March 2005): 3.}

The sacramental life of the church, and in particular the Eucharist, is in essence the lifting up of our lives through prayer.
In the world, woman and man together are “natural priests principally because they were brought into existence on earth last.” Their priesthood, according to Maximos the Confessor, has the goal of uniting the world and bringing it into harmonious relationship with God. As Evdokimov has reminded us, in the catacombs of the early Church, the most frequent image was that of the woman at prayer. To become prayer “makes the world into a temple of adoration, into a cosmic liturgy.”

Thus, the faithful unite the world through this prayer and bring it into a harmonious relationship with God, constituting our ascension into the kingdom. It is through the human as the priest in His priesthood, the “homo adorans,” that creation participates in the redemption wrought by God. Within the mutuality of presence as offered by God in Christ, and our reciprocal offering through Him, the Eucharistic community provides for us the locus and experiential framework in which we experience the risen Lord.

Nonetheless, it is this very experiential presence of the risen Lord, attested to by the faithful throughout the centuries, which has presented and continues to present questions and challenges to theologians: What is Eucharistic presence? What is Eucharistic transcendence? What do these experiential realities mean? How has this been

---


understood historically within the church? How has this reality been expressed in theological writings, reflections, and discourse? How can traditional as well as postmodern discourses express the reality of this unchanging experience? Where, perhaps has each age fallen short?

We must remember that although we may look to the physical sciences or various philosophies—whether idealism, realism, existential phenomenology, or post-modern deconstruction—for aid, sacramental theology has its grounding in the hard facts of biblical creation and the Incarnation, to which is added the revelation which comes through Jesus Christ. Thus, sacramental theology is Trinitarian science. Therefore, to explore what sacramental presence means is to inquire into a reality that is essentially relational in nature and which speaks of a dynamic of mutuality among persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The personal-relational aspect of sacramental presence is fundamental to our understanding of the mystery of presence, and as an aspect of communion Michael Gaudion-Parker provides a contemporary relational description:

The Great Prayer is in itself word-in-action creative of communication/communion between God and humanity and consequently, between human persons themselves. Prayer creates bonds because it is God’s gift of inspiration for the beauty of dialogue; it reveals our truth of relational being, it manifests the grace and goodness of wholeness in loving communion. The Eucharist in its wholeness transforms our experience of “I-Thou” in enabling us to discover our being in Christ as “we”—the communion of saints.11

Hence, although the concept of Eucharistic presence resists explanation, it challenges us to witness to our conviction as Christians that we experience this presence as a face-to-face encounter and communion with the Divine (as far as is possible for humans). This presence and its description go far beyond the capabilities of any classical or modern epistemology, metaphysics, or existential-phenomenology. God in presence and revelation opens up a new category of existence, a new way of knowing, and a new experience of phenomena within the existential context of the celebration of the Eucharist by the ecclesial community.

Epistemology is a challenging subject. The Western intellectual tradition has wrestled with the questions of “What do we know?” “How do we know?” and “What is the process of understanding?” Through these questions the science of epistemology has become the engine that has shaped and given direction to our culture. How could the entire academic discussion arise if it were otherwise? For positive science, the first

12 Our human experience, because we are relational beings, derives its true relational character from the persons of the Holy. An example of a most sublime expression of the relational nature of God is revealed in the icon of the Holy, written by St. Andre Rublev written between the years 1408 and 1425 A.D. and is based upon the account of the angelic visitations to Abraham (Gen. 18). Iconographically, it is known as the “Hospitality of Abraham.” This particular icon, venerated by Christians of the Eastern and Western traditions, is receiving much attention today due in part to the recent attempt within certain theological circles to recapture the preeminence of the human person, created in the image of God, within the created order. In this icon, we see depicted the images of angelic beings analogically representing the mystery of the divine “inner mutuality” perichoresis among the three persons of the Trinity. The icon represents revelation of persons, communion of persons, presence of persons, as the three persons are engaged in the freedom of agapic love. In these persons sharing inter-communion, we are invited to participate in the same inter-communion of the persons of the Godhead κοινωνία by virtue of the incarnate Logos, Jesus Christ.

postulate is that knowledge is possible. From this starting point, the seeker of knowledge begins by examining the raw data, extracting predictability from its series, testing its hypotheses, and coming to a conclusion from the hidden form embedded in a particular reality. The end of the process—that is, the knowledge gained, the understanding appropriated, the reality harnessed, and the conclusions applied—is what is understood as meaning.

Should the science of the Christian liturgy be any different? Are not the simple materials of bread, wine, water, or oil the starting point that lead us into a knowledge of the reality that points to God? Is not this act of pointing to God the true meaning of what is called sacrament? Is not the Eucharist a predictable series of prayers that lead to the uncovering of and an encounter with the mystery of the Living God? Is such not valid knowledge? May not we call this process science? In answering this question, we say, with boldness, “In our perspective, sacraments are symbols arising from the ministry of Jesus Christ and continued in and through the Church, which when received in faith, are encounters with the living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”

Here, Worgul is asserting that experiential knowledge of God is possible. How can this be? Whereas the sacraments or mysteries of the church supply a dimension of knowledge that is, on the one hand, resistant to human and scientific inquiry, on the other hand, such knowledge makes up for human deficiency because its fundamental source is

---


the salvific life of the risen Christ. As the hard sciences speak of knowledge by
penetrating the mysteries of the universe to discover and apply its forces, Christian
theology speaks of knowledge by encountering the Living God and coming to know Him
through the sacramental ritual. In this ritual and its celebration the ministry of the risen
Lord is made manifest within the ecclesial community. From this celebration a new
kind of knowing arises, and the sacraments are precisely the place where the encounters
with the living God takes place. The act of celebration is in one sense a discovery, but a
discovery that would be unknown to the Church if the Lord had not revealed it. The act of
celebration in another sense is a knowing, but a knowing that would not come with
understanding to the Church if the Lord had not bestowed its knowledge. Therefore, for
the Church, its sacraments, its mystery, its knowledge, and its understanding are
encounters that imply a dynamic of relationality between God and His creation, His
people—that is, the Church, which is His body, and its head, which is the risen incarnate
Christ, who further completes the relationality with the Father and the Spirit.

This context within which sacramental celebrations takes place, the body of Christ
or the body of believers is the matrix of sacramental reality. Here, the new knowing is
encountered! Through the sacraments or mysteries, the church and the entire created
order find and celebrate the very nature of this knowledge and are further directed to their
being, rooted in the living God. It is a divine and human praxis. From the human side, the
praxis teaches through the revelation supplied by Christ how knowledge leads to divine
knowledge; and from the divine side, the praxis in its turn leads to the transformation of

\[16\] For a review of the nature of ritual within a Eucharistic context, cf. Andrea Bieler and Luise Schottroff,
*The Eucharist: Bodies, Bread, Resurrection* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007).

11
this body of believers as it finds rest in the ontological source, the living God. The sacramental praxis thus lays bare the ultimate knowledge of reality and its processes, and ultimate being and its categories, and the ground and structure of our human existence.

Sacraments, since they have been instituted by the Lord, teach about God and reality; and like God, sacraments must be viewed in a holistic, all-encompassing fashion. The sacraments are not isolated ritualistic acts whose main purpose is to impart or infuse the believer with some “supernatural” reality, so that the believer may carry on life with the knowledge to manipulate reality. The sacraments are celebrative acts of the body of Christ that remind this body of its primordial nature and call it forth in its faith to become the creatures that God created for union with Him. Such a primordial image may help us to acquire an understanding of sacramental presence as a reciprocity of being, rather than as a mechanism for receiving that which earlier theological structures have identified as “supernatural.”

The question is raised here, then, concerning the older categories of thought of knowing God through the power of human reason infused with grace: Is such a worldview and scientific process alien to our present sacramental experience and the contemporary categories of thought that are relational, interconnected, and personal? From a contemporary viewpoint, sacramental celebrations may take on a new perspective. Meaning in our time that concerns our experience of the church can be effectively transmitted only when the sacraments Christ instituted are spoken of in terms and categories that affirm and reaffirm the saving presence of God within the created order as it has been restored in Jesus Christ. For the contemporary mind, the mystery of
sacramental presence has meaning only when it is spoken of in terms of the encounter as a *sacramentum*, or pledge of that which is to come.

When addressing the multiple understandings expressive of sacramental presence, we are faced with a number of challenges. First of all, when addressing the sacraments in general, we are challenged now to re-think some of the language and theological constructs of the scholastic tradition that remain operative within our sacramental vision and theology today. Second, we are faced with a paradox in which the notion of presence must in some way be addressed, not over and against the notion of absence, but in a complementary fashion that will attempt to do justice to the apophatic character of our experience of God.

The august contributions of scholastic theology to the church are not being called into question here. For nearly eight hundred years, its system has informed sacramental understanding. For example, the “presence of transcendence,” a common term used by some authors in contemporary philosophical and theological writings, is understood in terms of traditional scholastic metaphysics. What is this metaphysics? Simply, it states that the transcendent God is made present to His people through the agency of the celebrating minister acting *in persona Christi*—*ex opere operato*.

An example may be given of the Eucharistic understanding of Thomas Aquinas: when once the priest, *in persona Christi*, effects the bread and wine through the words of institution, *ex operate operato*, the Eucharistic elements can then be adored by the assembled faithful. Thomas’s Eucharistic hymn *Tantum Ergo Sacramentum* sums the reality up in the last line of the first stanza: *Praestet fides supplementum sensuum defectui* (“Faith for all defects supplying, where the feeble senses fail”). This one hymn
encapsulates the full scope of scholastic epistemology and ontology. Understood from the position of the magisterial teaching of the Roman Church theology, which supplies the understanding for this hymn, it is in no way defective. It expresses the immanence of the transcendent God Incarnate.

However, the theology is expressed in categories of thought that are alien to the post-modern world and no less to the post-modern Catholic. Who today thinks in the Aristotelian categories of substance and accident? Who today knows how to climb the ladder of rational ascent? Who today understands what it means to have the defective senses supplied by infused supernatural grace? For the sake of freedom of inquiry, the veracity of the magisterium’s teaching is not being questioned here. Rather, the alien philosophical-theological/superstructure(s) and its language, which grounds the official theology, are being challenged in favor of seeking a contemporary grounding in forms that are non-alien to the post modern world. Today, this scholastic thinking regarding classical onto-theology is being questioned along with its effectiveness in contemporary sacramental discourse:

While theological reflection upon sacrament (i.e., “sacramentology”) has tended to place sacrament within the context of a theology of incarnation, or even to instrumentalize its role therein, what “takes place” in sacrament has now come to the fore in theological reflection. “Thinking sacrament,” however, has not simply

\[17\] In using the term “onto-theology” in this chapter, I am referring to the broadest meaning of the term based on a metaphysical model inherited from the Hellenistic philosophical world, which later became the primary operative construct for theological discourse, especially among the Scholastics. As I demonstrate in chapter 2 regarding the contribution of Chauvet to the dialogue at hand, Chauvet presents a critique of metaphysics by Heidegger who, for Chauvet, proves to be the catalyst for a reevaluation of metaphysical terminology and constructs regarding the notions of “being” and “presence.”
gained a more prominent position in theological discourse in the postmodern age; rather it questions and challenges the very core of theologizing. Therefore, contemporary theology seems profoundly “Sacramento-theology.” The “enfleshment” of sacrament not only refuses to be reduced to a mere application of “metaphysical ideas,” it incarnates the presence of transcendence in such a way that one is moved more deeply that one can move oneself.¹⁸

The onto-theological understanding of sacramental presence is under scrutiny, investigation, and re-evaluation for a number of reasons. First, an onto-theological structure provides a rather mechanistic and reified understand of the sacraments of the church, whether eastern or western, in regard to their ability to mediate God’s saving grace, resulting in an unfortunate defect on the instrumental, causal level. Agency has become mechanistic, and with it the church as the body of Christ has followed in similar fashion. The positive intention of the theology of _ex opere operato_ has been reduced to saying that what is being mediated through the sacramental action is somehow a reified reality rather than a relational reality. The concept of transubstantiation is not being questioned here but rather the attaching of the Eucharistic mystery so closely to the sole agency of the priest who stands _in persona Christi_ and who alone mediates infused grace by virtue of his sacerdotal office. Such a concept relegates the laity to the role of passive agents, with grace being distributed to them through an intermediary—i.e., the priest. In other words, the liturgical mysteries have been, or at least are in danger of being, placed

in the realm of cause and effect in much the same way that the notion of causality is fashioned within traditional metaphysics. One could argue that such an effective understanding, prevalent for centuries, remains psychologically and theologically the prevalent notion of the Eucharistic mystery in both the western and eastern churches today.

However, the onto-theological system does not do justice to the dynamic of God’s interpersonal relationship, as seen from the perspective of the Eastern Church. The perspective is not an epistemological straining as is evident in the onto-theological system. Rather it is an encounter of His manifesting and offering of communion with His own personhood as the measure of eternal life and salvation. If indeed sacramental presence is speaking of any presence at all, from the perspective of the Eastern Orthodox Church it is, first and foremost, brought to bear in the kenotic Christ who, through his incarnation, reorients humanity and the entire created order to its first love, God.

The stark simplicity of the Eucharistic mystery converts us from being *consumers* into being consumed by Love. Christ’s presence among us casts a new light on our situation in the material world. He imbues us with a new sense of purpose and spirit of creative hope as he reveals the inner goodness of creation by taking into his hands and sharing the everyday stuff of our food and drink…his self-emptying (*kenosis*) in his sigh of consecratory love on the cross.\(^\text{19}\)

---

\(^\text{19}\) Gaudoin-Parker, *The Real Presence*, XXV-XXVI.
Faced with the paradox where the notion of presence must in some way be addressed, not over and against the notion of absence, but in a complementary fashion, the question is raised as to how, in the post-modern world, can justice be done to the apophatic character of our experience of God? What terms and thinking can we use to employ a notion of the presence of the transcendent One, the One who in and through the incarnation of the Logos of God, manifests the transcendent nature of God in and through the human–divine person of Jesus of Nazareth. This is a critical challenge.

One of the shortcomings of the onto-theological system concerns the continued presence of the risen Lord among his disciples in the world. The theology of *ex opera operato* may be severely and justly criticized on this one point. By stressing the agency of *in persona Christi* and assigning it to the celebrating minister of the altar, the risen Christ is pushed into the transcendent sphere of heaven where it seems he cannot be reached other than by the agency of the priest. By way of reductionism one asks, where is the risen Christ, and how does He communicate with us or, from the onto-theological perspective, how do we communicate with Him? Consider Farkasfalvy’s portrayal of the New Testament sensitivity that affirms in the worshiping community the living person and the living presence of the risen Christ.

Structurally, the most important passage in Matthew’s gospel is the last passage, which, indeed, constitutes such a statement about the continued presence of the Lord. Here the evangelist reached the final point of his narrative. Where we could rightfully expect to find a passage about Jesus’ permanent transfer to the heavenly realms, Jesus appears on top of the mountain in Galilee…the very mountain on which the Kingdom of God was proclaimed at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry.
(cf. Mt 5:1). So here is indeed, a return to the place of the beginning to Galilee, as had been previously announced in the Gospel itself. (21:32). The universal commission taking place on the mountain certainly harks back to the beginning of the book. In a special way, the last words uttered by Jesus, “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Mt 28:20), refer back to the very beginning of the composition (Mt 1:23) where the prophecy of Emmanuel by Isaiah (Is 7:24) was quoted. In this way, the first so-called fulfillment text and the last sentence by Jesus constitute the axis of the Gospel of Matthew. The word Immanu-El, interpreted as a promise to be fulfilled in the Messiah, is known as finally reaching fulfillment at his glorification with a permanence extended beyond all temporal and geographic limitations. Clearly, the divine presence is here expanded and eternalized in the world through the presence of the Glorified Lord. When Jesus’ last sentence, “I am with you,” is pronounced, the meaning of the messianic name “God-with-us” is fully realized.  

The early Christian communities celebrated their breaking of the bread within the context of the promise of the risen Lord, understanding that He would be with them for all time. For them the Eucharistic presence of the risen Lord was for Him to be with them as they would gather in His name. By remembrance and celebration of his descent, as the Son of God, and further descent through his death, and in his ascent into the heavens in glory, the incarnate Advocate and High Priest Jesus Christ, is ever present to those who

worship Him in spirit and in truth; to the degree that each in the believing community communes with His person through participation in the knowledge He has won for and in us by the Cross, as He unites us in further participation in and with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

The Parousaic and Eschatological Dimension of the Eucharistic Presence in Early Christianity

We now turn to a brief summary of the development of Eucharistic theology, which is necessary for a fuller understanding of various approaches in history and for guiding our thinking as Catholics and Orthodox together seek common ground in presenting the mystery to the post-modern world. The Christian Church teaches that our deepest identity as human beings is found in union with Christ, who is the truly human one. The mystical core of our being is not defined by our achievements, possessions, personalities, natural endowments, church affiliation, and its experiences. Rather, we claim our authentic personal humanity in the fact that God has been gracious to us and has made us one with him in Jesus Christ, by the Holy Spirit. Our union with Christ is the true ontological basis of humanity.

The Church further teaches that because of his “becoming flesh,” enanthropesis, the Son of God made what we are His own, so that because of what He is by nature as a human person in communion with God, God becomes ours in Him by grace through our union with Him. This Patristic principle, taken from Irenaeus, Origin, and Gregory Nazianzus, is the epistemological basis stated in the maxim, “What is not assumed is not redeemed.” To protect this double mystery ontologically and epistemologically, the Greek fathers, under the influence of Cyril of Alexandria developed the twin doctrines of
the *anhypostasis* and *enhypostasis*. The doctrine of the hypostatic union means that Jesus Christ was to be understood in terms of the personal and particular union of God and humankind. This union takes place when the one person of the Son assumes human nature into Himself and subsequently into His divine nature. The process encountered in the union of divine and human natures is entirely the act of God in becoming man. The result is that the Son of God exists as the man Jesus, son of Mary, in the integrity of His human agency. Apart from this act of God in becoming human, Jesus would not have existed at all. Therefore, the fully human life of Jesus must be regarded as the act of the Word of God becoming flesh.

Further, the human life of Jesus does not have an independent existence apart from the divine assumption of the flesh. The anhypostasis doctrine asserts that Christ’s human nature has its reality only in union with God, having no independent existence apart from the incarnation. Christ’s human personhood is human nature in communion with God, human being as it was intended by God to be. The doctrine of the enhypostasis asserts that Christ’s human nature was a real and specific existence in which Jesus had a fully human mind, body, and will. This means that we must think of the incarnation in terms not of God in humankind, but of God as a particular man, yet not ceasing to be God even while being wholly and actually that man. Therefore the hypostatic union is to be understood not only in terms of incarnation, but also soteriologically in terms of the reconciliation between God and humankind in the unity of his person, while reconciliation is to be understood not only in terms of an imitation and knowledge of Calvary, but also in the broad terms of the Incarnation that addresses the ontological and epistemological aspects of this mystery.
This maturing theology—a result of the hard work of the fourth-century church fathers as they emerged from the silence of the catacombs and into the public life of the empire, engaging in a defensive *apologia* for the Christian faith—was not created out of thin air, nor was it the product of fantasy or imagination. These thoughts were the development of the mystery that lay hidden, like seed, in the ancient Eucharistic liturgies. There in the rites and ceremonies of worship, the truth and meaning of sacrament was nurtured and kept alive by the remembrance, *anamnesis*, of the pattern of salvation revealed by the Word of God made flesh. Let us now examine this pattern.

When the disciples reflected on the incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ into the heavens, having experienced the presence of the living Christ in all those events, they discovered that a pattern, *hypodigma*, emerged in God’s dealing with the world and with humanity. This pattern was discovered to be throughout the scriptural witness and as the early disciples knew, due to their proximity to the living Lord, was grounded in the life of Christ. These same disciples recognized in this pattern the manner in which Divinity communicated with humanity. The Spirit in faith taught them that where the Son of Man is glorified, our human nature will be likewise glorified, at the right hand of the Father. The pattern is characterized by the following sequence: the anhypostasis is the cause of the enhypostasis, which leads to the re-union of humankind with God. The early disciples recognized this pattern as one of descent (i.e., the incarnation) and further recognized the Eucharistic liturgy as a pattern of ascent. The

21 For the notion of discovery as applied to the liturgy, see Pavel Florensky in “Mysteries and Rites,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (1986): 342.
church is now to “go” where the Lord goes in his exaltation as the Son of Man, seated at the right hand of the Father.

Schmemann refers to a liturgy of ascent that is characteristic of the working categories available to the early Christian experience as Church. The category was governed by the doctrine of the second coming, the *parousia*. The early Christians reasoned that by the coming of the Son of God, as the incarnation of the promise of God, all will be restored, saved by Christ. And the place to proclaim and teach this doctrine was in the Eucharistic assembly:

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 the ministry to the world. For there—in heaven—they were immersed in the new life of the Kingdom; and when, after their faces reflected the light, the “joy and peace” of the Kingdom, they were its witnesses.22

This promise and the keeping of the promise by God to renew all things is the basis of the celebrative nature of the church as an eschatological reality. The kingdom of God, now manifest in the person of Christ and of his ushering in of the kingdom, holds together the experience of the promise as a reality in the here-and-now of chronological time as experienced within the here-and-there of Kingdom time, the *kairos*, of the Eucharistic celebration.

---

In him (Christ) the future is present, God’s kingdom is at hand…. In a splendid coinage of Origen’s, Jesus is he autovasileia, the kingdom in person…. Jesus is the Kingdom, not simply by virtue of his physical presence but through the Holy Spirit’s radiant power flowing forth from him. In his Spirit-filled activity, smashing the demonic enslavement of man, the Kingdom of God becomes reality, God taking the government of this world into his own hands. Let us remember that God’s kingdom is an event, not a sphere. Jesus’ actions, words, sufferings break the power of that alienation which lies so heavily on human life. In liberating people, they establish God’s Kingdom. Jesus is that kingdom since through him the Spirit of God acts in the world.  

These early Christians knew from their encounter with the living God that the Kairon of the Lord’s day contained the promise of the parousia, as the day of eschatological hope in and through the risen Christ, calling it “the eighth day,” the day of promise by which the Holy Spirit inaugurates the time which knows no setting of the sun, in which all other days find their fulfillment:

…we can now affirm that the Church’s worship was born and, in its external structure, “took shape” primarily as a symbol of the kingdom, of the Church’s ascent to it and, in this ascent, of her fulfillment as the body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit. The whole newness, the uniqueness of the Christian leitourgia was in its eschatological nature as the presence here and now of the

---

future *parousia*, as the epiphany of that which is to come, as communion with the “world to come.” …[I]t is precisely out of this eschatological experience that the “Lord’s day” was born as a *symbol*, i.e. manifestation now of the kingdom. It is this experience that determined the Christian “reception” of the Jewish feasts of Passover and Pentecost, as feasts precisely of a “pass-over” from the present “aeon” to the one which is to come, and thus—symbols of the Kingdom of God.24

The early Christian experience of prayer finds its roots in the Jewish liturgical tradition with its three-fold aspects of remembrance, thanksgiving, and expectation. The *parousia* of Christ within the Christian liturgical setting of the Eucharistic gathering can be understood on at least two levels; first, the *parousia* of Christ is a sense of presence which is imminent and immediate, the fulfillment of his promise by the Spirit to be gathered with them where two or three are gathered in his name. The *parousaic* presence of Christ derives from the once-for-all (*hapax*) event as the One offers himself for the life of the world and is manifested in the mandate given at the Mystical Supper in the breaking of the bread. This immediacy of his presence to his disciples and to the world distinguishes the Christian character of *parousia* as unique, confirming His presence with joy, in the joyful expectation of those gathered in his name.

The community of believers also, like the people of Israel, remember by looking back and recounting the power of the salvific work of God wrought throughout creation and the life of the world, beginning with its genesis and the fall of humanity, and

continuing through the dynamic of the history of ancient Israel which contains all of the prophetic promises of the day of salvation. When these remembrances are acknowledged by the Christian as accomplished by the Son of Man, and when thanksgiving is offered with the further expectation of His second coming, the *parousia*, in this broad sense of promise through prayer, is the One who is in the midst of his people. This looking back in remembrance of the work of God in the Christian community is actualized, existentially, by God for the people of God, who remember God’s work in and through salvation history. The *parousia* as remembrance is manifest in the sacrifice on Golgotha, wherein in the Son of God pours out his life for the many, which is liturgically made present in worship through the Eucharistic sacrifice and brought to bear on the human condition through the promises of life eternal as communion—i.e., experiential knowledge of God. The reference to the promise is fulfilled in and through the crucified and risen Lord. Second, the *parousia* of Christ is understood in reference to his return in glory on the last day, which is even now inaugurated in the joyful expectation of the kingdom of God to come as it is ushered in through the incarnation and life of Christ.

What we experience in the divine Eucharist is the end times making itself present to us now. The Eucharist is not a repetition or continuation of the past, or just one event amongst others, but it is the penetration of the future into time. The Eucharist is entirely live, and utterly new; there is no element of the past about it. The Eucharist is the incarnation live, the crucifixion live, the resurrection live, the ascension live, the Lord’s day coming again and the day of judgment, live. We cannot go to it casually or without repentance for it is the event in which all events are laid out and examined. “Now is the judgment of the world” (John
12.31). This “now” of the Fourth Gospel refers to the Eucharist, in which all these events represent themselves immediately to us, without any gaps of history between them.25

Thus, human history, the human condition and the cosmos itself find their ultimate telos in Christ. The early Christian community had a Eucharistic consciousness that maintained not only a service to give form or shape to the early church liturgy, but also an understanding of God, Christ, and each person’s own self-identity. Each person is ontologically grounded in the reality of being as the body of Christ and the telos of all history as we know it. The eschatological image of the church as communion, a koinonia with God and with each of its members, is characteristic of the sacramental celebrations of the early church. The koinonia is the promise of the restoration and healing of the people of God as members of the kingdom of God as it is manifest in and through the person of Jesus Christ. It is in and through Him that the church “as sacrament” is gathered into the mystery of Christ’s healing presence.

The Eucharistic Presence in Scripture and Patristic Literature

We can profitably reflect on the Eucharistic and sacramental consciousness of the Johannine community as portrayed in the Gospel of John. In this gospel, Jesus invites his disciples to partake of his flesh and blood, a concept abhorrent to the Jews. Such an invitation by Jesus prompts those who hear his words immediately to express disdain, confusion, and repulsion: “Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, 25

how this man can give us his flesh to eat?” (John 6:52) and “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?” (John 6:60). Yet it is this very invitation of Christ, as shocking as it is to those on the receiving end of these mysterious words, which provides the biblical testimony of the union Christ desires with humanity. As the bread of life, the manna from heaven, Jesus invites those disciples to partake of his very being, in the depth of his life, on levels which initially appear to be impossible for humanity. In this text, referring to his future passion during the time of the Passover, Christ expresses his desire to eat the Passover with his disciples. This Johannine text and testimony of the apostle and evangelist became the normative imagery for expressing the truth of Christ’s presence in and through the Eucharistic gifts. This interpretation is not without debate even to this day; yet the fathers of the church employ such scriptural testimonies in their apologetics and catechesis. Their purpose is to invite believers to elevate their hearts, minds, and entire lives to the worship of God and to live in communion with him.

Augustine, in Sermon 226, presents us with a unifying and holistic synthesis between the Eucharistic species and the body of believers, indicating that the way in which the body and blood of Christ can be properly received is for believers to perceive themselves as the body of Christ:

I am not unmindful of the promise by which I pledged myself to deliver a sermon to instruct you, who have just been baptized, on the Sacrament of the Lord’s table, which you now look upon and of which you partook last night. You ought to know what you have received, what you are going to receive, and what you ought to receive daily. That Bread which you see on the altar, consecrated by the Word of God, is the Body of Christ. That chalice, or rather, what the chalice holds,
consecrated by the Word of God, is the Blood of Christ. Through those accidents, the Lord wished to entrust to us His Body and Blood which He poured out for the remission of sins. If you have received worthily, you are what you have received, (italics mine) for the Apostle says: ‘The bread is one; we though many, are one body.’

This self perception is not a creation of the human, but a sacramental response to the divine initiative of God. We do not create the church; rather, the church as the body of believers finds its source in God. The familiar invitation of Augustine resounds well here: “Be what you can see, and receive what you are.” Indeed, in the prayer of the anaphora ascribed to St. John Chrysostom, during the invocation of the Holy Spirit, the pray,

Once again we offer to You this spiritual worship without the shedding of blood and we ask, pray and entreat You; send down your Holy Spirit upon us and upon these gifts here presented...

Note that the prayer implores the Spirit to descend on the body of those gathered in the Name of Christ, first, and then on the Eucharistic gifts:

____________________


In the case of the Eucharist, attention must be paid to the role of the Holy Spirit in the event of the transformation of the Eucharistic elements into the sacraments of the Body and Blood of Christ; to the nature and action of the Holy Spirit by which the Eucharistic community is sanctified and thus enabled to offer acceptable worship to the Father in union with the crucified and risen Lord…The Eastern tradition is especially sensitive to this function of the Holy Spirit in the economy of salvation, namely, that of bringing the Church to Christ and Christ to the Church. This insight underlines the epiclesis of the liturgies of various sacraments. The Spirit is invoked both to bring Christ to the Church and over the assembled Church in order to bring it to Christ. Both movements are essential. If Christ is not brought to the assembly there is a purely human Ceremony; if the Church is not brought to Christ the liturgy is meaningless.29

Like the Augustinian notion of the gifts, this prayer implies that the body and blood of the risen Christ within the Eucharistic species is intimately connected to believers’ realizing and appropriating to themselves the Body of Christ imagery prominent in Pauline theology. In other words, there must be an existential realization of the very body of the Church as that which is consecrated by the Holy Spirit, who ultimately reveals the Christ as Lord.

During the Patristic period, the Fathers of the Church\textsuperscript{30} employed a variety of images and means of symbolism in theologizing, both formally and informally, about the transformative presence of the risen Christ in the Eucharistic community. The boldness and variety of thought and theological expression manifests the creativity of the Fathers, not in creating a Eucharistic theology but in articulating what was known to be foundational and true within the living Tradition of the Church:

The writings of the Fathers of the Church reveal the wonderfully pluriform nature of their reflections on the Eucharist, a plurality of approaches that highlights the many aspects of the Sacrament itself. They all worked from two apparently fundamental data of faith; the Presence of Christ in the Sacrament and the sacrificial aspect of the Sacrament. The Presence was the Flesh born of Mary, and so the Eucharist was to be adored. With increasing perception they mentioned and reflected upon the change that takes place in the elements of bread and wine, although it is surely true that some of them realized the extent and profundity of that change and made more of it than others. In none of them were the symbolic aspects of the Sacrament neglected. The very formation of the bread and wine mirrored the unity of the Church. The Reality that the bread and wine became in the Consecration created the unity of the Church and was the motive and cause for fraternal charity.\textsuperscript{31}


Even a cursory search reveals the certainty of the Church Fathers—those closest to the founding of the Church—in the Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. St Ignatius writes of desiring “the Bread of God, which is the Flesh of Jesus Christ, who was of the seed of David, and for drink I desire His Blood, which is love incorruptible.” 32 St. Justin, in his well known “First Apology” to the Roman Senate, speaks of the Eucharist in uncompromising terms: “For not as common bread nor common drink do we receive these; but…as we have been taught, the food which has been made into the Eucharist by the Eucharistic prayer set down by Him, and by the change of which our blood and flesh is nourished, is both the flesh and the blood of that incarnated Jesus.” 33 Likewise, in his Catechetical Lectures from around the year 350, St. Cyril of Jerusalem teaches, “For just as the bread and the wine of the Eucharist before the holy invocation of the adorable Trinity were simple bread and wine,…the invocation having been made, the bread becomes the Body of Christ and wine the Blood of Christ.” 34 St. Irenaeus appeals simply to the authority of the Lord himself in presenting the reality: “…He took from among creation that which is bread, and gave thanks, saying, ‘This is my Body.’ The cup likewise, which is from among the creation to which we belong, He confessed to be His Blood.” 35


33 Justin Martyr, First Apology, between A.D. 48 and 155, in Ibid., 55.

34 Ibid., 359.

35 Against Heresies, between 180 and 199. Ibid., 95.
Just as truly, though, the Fathers were aware of the symbolic value, with no apparent indication of a perceived dichotomy between the reality and the Eucharist as a symbol and sign of unity. In the same lectures cited above, St. Cyril exhorts the faithful “with full confidence” to “partake of the Body and Blood of Christ. For in the figure of bread His Body is given to you, and in the figure of wine His Blood is given to you.”

In one of his homilies on 1 Corinthians, St. John Chrysostom speaks clearly to both the reality and the symbolic value of the Eucharist in his skillful use of analogy:

What is the Bread? The Body of Christ! What do they become who are partakers therein? The Body of Christ! Not many bodies, but one Body. For just as the bread, consisting of many grains, is made one, and the grains are no longer evident, but still exist, though their distinction is not apparent in their conjunction; so too are we conjoined to each other and to Christ. For you are not nourished by one Body while someone else is nourished by another Body; rather, all are nourished by the same Body.

The general theological posture of the Fathers of the Church, their overwhelming conviction of the reality of Eucharistic presence, as varied as these understandings are, serves as a legitimate and lasting framework for our own explorations.

From the earliest Eucharistic gatherings of the church, as we have seen, the naturally “self-evident” parousaic and eschatological reality of the presence of the risen of Christ is evident. We find such testimony in the liturgical prayers and rites of the

---

36 Ibid., 360-361.

celebrating community, in the various writings and commentaries of the earliest fathers common to both the Eastern and Western Christian traditions. What is absent among the earliest writers of the church, however, is a clear systematic analysis and description of Eucharistic presence, or the Eucharist in general:

This lack of clarity can at times be a cause of wonder or concern to someone who would expect to find a fully elaborated presentation of the Church’s doctrine on the Eucharist in the Patristic writings. In fact, however, no such expectation should exist at all. Most of the literature that remains for us to examine exists in the form of letters, sermons or works of Christian apology whose direct concerns were other than a presentation a Eucharistic theology. Indeed, the first full treatise on the Eucharist was produced only in the ninth century.38

Thus, the lack of a fully elaborated doctrine of the Eucharistic presence should not be a cause of concern. The scriptural and Patristic reflections on the varied meanings or expressions of the presence of God or of Christ are more descriptive than definitive:

The first millennium of Christian thought was dominated by ‘Patristic’ theology, which is named after the writers who practiced it and not the methods that is used. [italics mine] Patristic theology was a more immediate reflection on faith. The historical speculative were not yet clearly distinguished, and appearances we no subject to the suspicion that would be later raised against them. The Fathers, in their Neoplatonic style, accepted the display of Christian things as part of the

38 Ibid., 3-4.
subject of their theology. Emanation, spendor, presence, concealment, and imaging were spontaneously accepted and vividly described. It is this aspect of Christian reflection that the theology of manifestation is to recover…  

Language, signs, and symbols are evocative in nature, are invitations to experience realities that transcend human reason and categorization. The presence of Christ, which can be experienced in many and varied ways among the believers and uniquely to each one of us, remains a mystery in the true sense of the word.

The traditional scriptural and Patristic language and references to the presence of Christ are presented in a fashion better described as prismatic than systematic. The trajectory of the Patristic tradition is based on a holistic interpretation of divine presence. In the early church’s Eucharistic consciousness, the disruption or chasm between the body of Christ as received through the bread and wine, and the body of Christ as the body of believers gathered in his name, was not normative. Such a gulf between these two notions became much more prevalent during the Middle Ages and has become important in our contemporary perception of the church and the sacraments.

[A] fundamental change that is beginning to take place in the ninth century is the loosening of the unity between the Christological and ecclesiological meanings of the “body of Christ.” In Paul and in Augustine, the body of Christ in the


Eucharist is understood in both its Christological and ecclesiological senses. Participation in the Eucharist means both participation in Christ himself and participation in his body the Church. In the patristic period, the term “body of Christ” meant primarily the Church, in the tradition of Paul and Augustine. In the Middle Ages, the term “body of Christ” came to mean primarily the sacramental presence of Christ on the altar.\textsuperscript{41}

Thus, in both Orthodoxy and Catholicism, the Patristic tradition remains a vital source of Eucharistic witness, not so much to establish proof texts of the reality of Christ’s presence, but to demonstrate the fathers’ deliberate intentions and their holistic vision in defending the truth of the presence of Christ within the celebrations of the mysteries of the Church. Their reflections on the Eucharistic presence of Christ do not appear, as Henri de Lubac\textsuperscript{42} shows, to be a “separated theology”;\textsuperscript{43} that is, they did not see the Eucharistic gifts in isolation, as if separated from the whole context of the church, or life in Christ as “species centered” at the expense of the broader experience of the risen Christ. Although such a perspective is understandable, given the theological challenges of the church throughout the centuries in defending the “real presence” of Christ, one


would be hard pressed to find such an approach among the fathers, at least in a systematic way.

Among the earliest accounts of the Eucharistic celebrations of the Church which describe the ordo, we find the Didache or The Lord’s Instruction to the Gentiles to the Twelve Apostles. It is in this work that we find the ‘earliest eucharistic prayers recorded.’

Referencing the Eucharist, the Didachist states:

Regarding the Eucharist. Give thanks as follows: ‘We give Thee thanks, Our Father, for the Holy Vine of David Thy servant, which Thou hast made known to us through Jesus, Thy Servant.’ ‘To Thee be the glory for evermore.’ Next, concerning the broken bread: ‘We give Thee thanks, Our Father, for the life and knowledge which Thou has made known to us through Jesus, Thy Servant.’ ‘To Thee be the glory for evermore.’ ‘As this broken bread was scattered over the hills and the, when gathered, became one mass, so may Thy Church be gathered from the ends of the earth into Thy Kingdom. For Thine is the glory and power through Jesus Christ for evermore’ ‘Let no one eat and drink of your Eucharist but those baptized in the name of the Lord; to this, too, the saying of the Lord is applicable: Do not give to dogs what is sacred. ‘After you have taken your fill of food, give thanks as follows: ‘We give Thee thanks, O Holy Father, for Thy holy name which Thou hast enshrined in our hearts and for the knowledge and faith


36
and immortality which Thou has made known to us through Jesus, Thy Servant.’
‘To Thee be the glory for evermore.’ ‘Thou, Lord Almighty, hast created all
things for the sake of Thy name and hast given food and drink for men to enjoy,
that they may give thanks to Thee; but to us Thou hast vouchsafed spiritual food
and drink and eternal life, through Jesus, Thy Servant.’

What we see here in the progression of the Eucharistic celebration is the reference
to the Father’s offering of food and drink to humanity for our sustenance and enjoyment.
This offering of thanks to the Father for our sustenance is an initial reference to our daily
nourishment which sustains our earthly life. A shift in language and meaning becomes
evident when, while acknowledging the universal reception of that which is gifted by
God to all of humanity, the eschatological nature of the Eucharistic becomes evident in
the phrase; ‘…but to us Thou has vouchsafed spiritual food and drink and eternal life
through Jesus, Thy Servant.’ Also, this eschatological theme is preceding by the identity
of the ecclesia as a gathering ‘…from the ends of the into Thy Kingdom.’ Thus, the
reference to “spiritual food and drink and eternal life” which indicates the eschatological
hope of the ecclesia within the context of a parousaic framework. For our purposes,
what is significant here is not a matter of a dichotomy between our earthly and heavenly
sustenance, but the fulfillment of a promise of presence in and through Jesus. Also, the
admonition by the Didachist regarding the partaking of the Eucharist of only those who

______________________________

46 Quasten, Didache, 20-21.
are already baptized, indicates that the Eucharistic gifts are regarded as spiritual in nature and reserved for those of faith who have been initiated through the mystery of baptism.

A common element in all of the early writings is a rigorous apologetic for the reality of communion with the risen Christ by way of the assembly in the Spirit and the reception of the bread of immortality. Ignatius of Antioch’s image of the “medicine of immortality” stands out in its portrayal of believers’ reception of the Eucharist as a remedy for the disintegration of the human condition, an antidote to sin and death. Taken as a whole, the formal development of Eucharistic theologies in subsequent centuries regarding what has become known as the “real presence” will be discussed later. The main point here is the evidence of many prayers, writings, commentaries, and sermons in the apostolic tradition which, as a whole and in a variety of ways and under many forms, confirm the foundational axiom of the mystery of presence.

Shifts in Understanding Regarding the Eucharist

The Impact of the Christological Controversies Regarding the Eucharistic Vision

Though both the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches see the Eucharist as the “sacraments of sacraments,” and both would acknowledge that the church is most herself when she celebrates the Eucharist, both have also experienced fundamental attitudinal shifts over time in their understanding of the Eucharist. These are problematic and challenging, requiring responses within each tradition and in ways unique to each

---


48 A survey of Eucharistic themes, including the notion Eucharistic presence and the Eucharist as the foundation of the Church can be found in Aidan Nichols, The Holy Eucharist: From the New Testament to Pope John Paul II, Dublin: Hyperion, 2011.
tradition’s ethos. One of the earliest challenges faced by the church in both East and West was the Christological controversies, for which the Ecumenical Councils were called in order to clarify and articulate the dogmatic faith, first as understood and then as celebrated in the Christian Eucharistic tradition. Only one aspect of the complex Christological controversies will be considered here as dealing most directly with the Eucharistic presence: the so-called “high Christology” born of the councils.

The Christological controversies led to losing sight of the humanity of the glorified, risen Christ. The risen Jesus was becoming a distant God. Social and economic factors, religious movements of dissent and reform, a shift in the liturgical genre from meal to ritual drama, from symbolic action to dramatic allegory also played a role. The lingering effects of the Christological controversies, however, seem to have taken the heaviest toll. In any event, a shift was in progress in which the Eucharist was becoming more of an object than an action that transformed the community, more an awesome miracle than a joyful sharing. The debates over Christ’s presence would only accelerate this movement.  

The major Christological controversies marking the beginning centuries of the church’s history and the subsequent Ecumenical Councils, affected the church’s self-perception because it became necessary to formulate Christological beliefs in relationship to the Eucharist. In the church’s quest to dogmatize the divine and human natures of

---

Christ, a certain “high Christology” of the fourth and subsequent centuries dominated the theological enterprise. This “high Christology” is found in the prologue of the Gospel according to John as the evangelist proclaims that the Logos of God became flesh in the person of Jesus and, over time, the humanity of Christ began to take on a lesser role relative to the image of Jesus’s divinity. The Christological balance dogmatized by the fathers of the Ecumenical Councils in dealing specifically with the Christological controversies included the task of clarifying the nature and person of the incarnate Logos of God relative to His personhood and mission of redemption. The resultant theological position laid heavy stress on His nature as being fully divine in that, as the Son of God, He shares in the same divine nature as the Father with the focus concentrated on a “Christology of descent”:

The Chalcedonion approach is often called a “high Christology,” or a “Christology from above,” because it emphasizes the “high” or divine status of Jesus. The Divine has come down into history and become a human being in Jesus of Nazareth in order to save humanity. To be sure, Jesus remains a human being for Chalcedon. The intuition of the Church was that unless Jesus was truly human, we couldn’t say the Divine had really entered into the human plight as we know it and filled it with the divine, saving power. But the focus and marvel for Christians was on the Divine—it was the Divine which had descended. Here we encounter another designation for the classical Christology: it is a “Christology of descent” on the part of the Divine.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Thompson, The Hope, 46.
The “high Christology” and the “Christology of descent,” although normative and expressive of orthodox dogma and traditional Christology, resulted in an experiential lacuna in the consciousness of the church between the humanity of Jesus and His divinity. This type of Christology resulted in the divinity of Christ taking precedence in the consciousness of the church to the neglect and detriment, some theologians and historians maintain, of the human Jesus—remembered and celebrated as the One who preached, taught, healed, raised the dead, cast out demons, and voluntarily went to the cross as the martyr-witness of God’s love and desire for our salvation. It proved much more difficult for the participants in the councils to articulate what is meant by the humanity of Jesus vis-à-vis how a human could share in the divinity of God while remaining human, than it was for theologians to defend and articulate the divinity of Jesus. Subsequently, and for other reasons, the high Christology imagery took precedence at the expense of the humanity of Jesus, thus resulting in what McKenna identifies as a “losing sight of the humanity of the glorified, risen Christ.” 51 The Jesus of Nazareth who embraced sinners and those on the utmost fringes of society was giving way to a more remote Jesus, more aligned in the minds of some to a God who is distant and less accessible to the human condition. The need for a “lower Christology”—i.e., a Christology and theological anthropology starting with human nature—arose as a corrective to balance what the councils affirmed and articulated as the Christ of two natures, fully divine and fully human. The quest for a more human side of Jesus can be

seen in the works of contemporary Christologies (which are beyond the scope of this dissertation).

The implications of this high Christology for the Eucharist, coupled with other factors, are notable and are evidenced in the undivided, universal church, East and West. Beginning in the fourth century in the time of Chrysostom, and perhaps because of the connection between the imperial state and the church, the image of Christ was portrayed through the medium of an imperial hierarchy, which by its very nature lent itself to a dynamic that seemed to distance the faithful from what appears to be unreachable and therefore an unapproachable goal, in the Eucharistic Body and Blood of Christ. The loftiness and unapproachability that became associated with the Risen Lord in the mystery of the Eucharist, coupled with the complexities associated with the various schools of penitential disciplines, especially in the monastic movement that developed within the life of the church, also widened the distance between the faithful and the reception of the gifts. Another factor was the rising notion of the necessity for sacramental penance as a pre-condition for receiving the Eucharist, as opposed to the general posture of Christians who, in striving to live their lives in Christ, maintain a sense of repentance on a daily basis. Another development was a heightened or even extreme sense of unworthiness on the part of the faithful in receiving the Eucharistic gift. Such a sense of unworthiness, while understandably relevant for the pious believer, nonetheless became another distancing factor in the relational dynamic between not only the believer and Christ, but ultimately among the faithful themselves. The ecclesial, communal

52 The history of this phenomenon, long and complex, is addressed in summary by Alexander Schmemann in his book *Great Lent* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1974), 126-133.
character of the faithful gave way to a certain individualism which only served to further a sense of distancing within the celebrating community itself. These factors, along with further developments, particularly in the Western Church, led to the eventual objectification of the Eucharistic gifts and the challenges presented by it.

The Eucharistic Presence in Medieval Theology

The term “real presence” as applied to the Eucharist originated, according to O’Connor, for perhaps the first time in a treatise of Urban IV in the thirteenth century; certainly it is well known and widely covered in summaries and commentaries relative to the Reformation.\(^5^3\) The notion of the real presence, however, predates the Reformation. In the ninth century, Amalar of Metz carried the agents of physicality to an extreme, coupled with allegorical imagery of the Eucharist. Paschiasius Radbertus also in the ninth century heightened the concept of the reality of Christ’s presence in the Eucharistic gifts, as well as physicality. In a rebuttal to Paschiasius’ overly realistic notion of the body and blood of Christ, Rastramnus employed the language of \textit{figura} in referencing the body of Christ. In the eleventh century, Berenger of Tours\(^5^4\) also reacted to his predecessors’ sense of an all-too-physical body of Christ, proposing in response that the elements are \textit{symbols} of Christ’s presence. Symbol in Berenger’s sense, however, was seen in opposition to reality; Berenger thus characterized the sacraments as mere representations, thus denying the reality of Christ’s presence. In Berenger, we can see that the notion of


symbol had begun to experience a certain degeneracy within the broader view or consciousness of the church. No longer did the Patristic understanding of symbol prevail, in which the symbol allows an actual participation in the reality it symbolizes; the depth and richness of the meaning of the symbolic begins to lose its impact, eventually coming to be understood in opposition to reality.\textsuperscript{55}

It became the task of the great Scholastics, such as Thomas Aquinas, to formulate a language adequate to express the reality of the change of the elements and ultimately to balance and correct any gross physicality in connection with the Eucharistic elements. Thomas employed Aristotelian philosophical language to ensure the teaching that a change takes place but within the construct of metaphysics. Within the Scholastic approach, the Eucharistic gifts were placed into and scrutinized within philosophical, analytical, and metaphysical constructs, which tended toward an objectification of the Eucharistic gifts as being “things” to be analyzed. Throughout this process, the Eucharistic elements became the primary focus of theology as seen through the lens of scientific inquiry, and the larger dynamic of the relational nature of the body of Christ, the ecclesial community, was neglected. As a result of this process, a certain rupture took place; a disintegrative principle was introduced and became operative in Eucharistic understanding, a principle otherwise unknown in the experiential consciousness of the celebrating church. Henri de Lubac characterizes this disruption as resulting in a “deadly dichotomy”\textsuperscript{56} between the Eucharistic body and the ecclesial body. This rupture occurred


around the end of the twelfth century. What was this rupture? According to Chauvet, there existed in the mind of the Scholastics the notion of the “threefold” body of Christ: “(1) his historical and glorious body; (2) his Eucharistic body which was called his ‘mystical’ body up until the end of the twelfth century because it is ‘his body in mystery,’ that is to say, in sacrament; (3) and his ecclesial body, growing throughout history.”

For as long as and to the degree that the Scholastics held the Augustinian-Patristic notion of the Eucharist in tension between the “mystical body” in sacrament and Christ’s ecclesial body in history, the relational paradigm continued to survive in the understanding of the Eucharist as it existed in the medieval Church. But with the introduction of Aristotle and the new synthesis brought about in medieval theology through the monumental work of Thomas Aquinas and his *Summa Theologiae*, academic thinking in its treatment of the Eucharist shifted to a rational consideration of metaphysical questions concerning the Eucharist’s substance and accidents. As an enterprise in the science of metaphysical parsing, the Scholastics provided a rational explanation for the mystery of the elements of the Eucharist, and did so with great genius; but as they did so, they partially explained away the mystery and further developed the importance of the agent cause in the Eucharistic sacrifice, that being the celebrating priest. In so doing, they were quite unaware of the damage that they were to cause to the ecclesial body, as they held serene faith in the Eucharistic elements. Who can question


Thomas’s faith, having read his tract on the Eucharist found in the *Summa* and having sung the great Eucharistic hymn, the *Pange Lingua*? But Thomas was the exception. He knew, as he admitted after a vision shortly before his death, that what he had written was “all straw.” The concern presently is what happened to those in the church who, once having tasted of the assuredness of Aristotelian-Scholastic theology, did not return to Patristic and Scriptural roots? The further concern is what happened to those in the church who, having once tasted of Aristotelian-Scholastic theology, desired to return to both Scripture and the fathers?

Reformation Challenges to Eucharistic Doctrines

Unsurprisingly, the reformers each presented critical views of the church’s theological positions and language regarding the Eucharistic presence: Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and Wycliffe, as some of the more prominent, each brought to the conversation their respective positions and eventual challenges to the church regarding the real presence. The Church in the West found itself in the position of having to defend orthodox teaching and belief about the Eucharistic presence. Though the defenders did not proceed from the premise that any exhaustive terminology or explanation can ever be adequately put forth to explain Eucharistic change, nonetheless the task of employing terminology and setting parameters fell to the Fathers of the Church, particularly those participating in the Council of Trent held from December 13, 1545–December 4, 1563.

Two specific challenges of the reformers addressed at the council of Trent are those of the reality of Christ’s presence and the possible modalities of his presence, as well as the issue of the propitiatory sacrifice accomplished during the mass or liturgy, since the issues raised by Luther and other reformers related not only to the Eucharistic
presence itself but also to the liturgical practices and pieties that had developed within the Church around the Eucharistic species. The council addressed other issues, such as those related to the priesthood and its relationship to the powers of the priest to consecrate the gifts offered in the Eucharistic.

At the Council of Trent, the term *transubstantiation*, as defined by Thomas Aquinas, found another level of acceptability and validity.\(^{59}\) It was presented as the reality and correct belief in the face of the various challenges as to what is meant by the presence of Christ—some holding to the notion that no substantial change takes place in the Eucharist, others relegating the Eucharistic species to simple signs of Christ’s presence, and still others adhering to the principle that the Eucharistic species convey only a “symbolic” presence of Christ, with the term *symbolic* meant in opposition to *real*. *Transubstantiation* came to prominence as the term that could most adequately, to the degree any word can, carry the message of the Church’s certain belief in Eucharistic reality. It had been used by the Fourth Lateran Council (1215 AD) against the Albigensians to articulate the church’s conviction that in transubstantiation there is confectioned a change in the substance of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. According to David Power, the term *transubstantiation* may not, at that time, have been used in the church’s language with any precise philosophical technicality. Citing Peter of Capua (13\(^{th}\) century), Power contends that Peter maintained three opinions on the matter:

One is the position that the substance of bread and the substance of wine remain simultaneously with the substance of Christ’s body and blood, a position that came to be dubbed consubstantiation. A second is that the substance of bread and wine was annihilated and then replaced by the substance of Christ’s body and blood. The third position recorded is that of substantial change. Peter himself holds for the third position, though he does not think that the previous two are contrary to the doctrine of real presence.60

The decree of the Council of Trent, however, uses transubstantiation in a more technical and philosophical sense than had occurred earlier:

And because that Christ, our Redeemer, declared that which He offered under the species of bread to be truly His own body, therefore has it ever been a firm belief in the Church of God, and this holy Synod doth now declare it anew, that, by the consecration of the bread and of the wine, a conversion is made of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord, and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of His blood; which conversion is, by the holy Catholic Church, suitably and properly called Transubstantiation.61


61 J. Waterworth, ed. and trans., *The Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Oecumenical Council of Trent*, The Thirteenth Session (London: Dolman, 1848), 75-91. Hanover Historical Texts Project, scanned by Hanover College students in 1995. history.hanover.edu/texts/trent.html
Eventually, the term *transubstantiation* became crystallized in the traditional language of the Church, and it still carries the full theological weight that it did at the Council of Trent with a newer approach in understanding the implications of the term. While the term remains normative in the language of the church, caution must be applied and in our understanding so that, while maintaining such terminology, we remain cognizant of the fact that what is being celebrated in the Eucharist is the gift of Christ – Christ as gift, his personal offering of his abiding presence through himself as giver and gift. Christ is present first; the Eucharistic meal in its action, and in and through the Eucharistic gifts, celebrates and realizes the presence of Christ as it is appropriated by the believers as recipients of the gift. This presence is pluriform in nature as attested to by Edward Schillebeeckx:

The third factor which has contributed to the re-evaluation of Eucharistic theology is the renewed appreciation for the several “real presences” of Christ. The restriction of the real presence to the presence of Christ in the Eucharistic species only dates from the time of Duns Scotus. But as the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (art. 7) and the encyclical *Mysterium Fidei* have recently stated, there is also a real presence of Christ in the liturgical assembly, there is a real presence of Christ in the priest in liturgical service, there is a real presence of Christ in the sacraments, and finally, there is a real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Each of these multiple forms of “real presence” has its proper mode of reality. The doctrine of transubstantiation, then, does not restrict the real presence to the
Eucharist, but rather evaluates and determines the mode of real presence proper to the Eucharist.62

Schillebeeckx’s recognition of the plurality of Eucharistic presence can prove helpful in the endeavor to understand the multi-faceted manners in which the Risen Christ gifts himself to the faithful of the Church through the medium of the sacraments.

Thus, even as we recognize that the Eucharistic dialogues of the Middle Ages were necessary, the challenge in approaching the medieval notion of the Eucharist is to be aware of the theology of Scholasticism and its categories, methods, language, and constructs used as tools to present a theology of the real presence in a systematic fashion, employing Aristotelian metaphysical language. Awareness of this methodology can be helpful in understanding how the Church of the Middle Ages arrived at this point in Eucharistic theology. Knowledge of these developments, and the particular metaphysics of how substance and accidents work, can go far in articulating a Eucharistic theology. But we must also ask if, in addressing the post-modern world, relational models, which may be more consistent with traditional Patristic theologies, may also be more informative and feasible for various Christian Eucharistic theologies today. The dynamic of relationality can attest to a more consistent vision of Eucharistic presence, usurping the static imagery of the consecrated Eucharistic gifts which evolved from the Tridentine framework:

Decisive for the judgment about the value of the doctrine of transubstantiation is the consideration of the function it exercised in systematic Eucharistic theology. This teaching holds together the visible-invisible, and maintains the levels of reality, and the openness of the world for freedom of divine action. Concretely, the intimate relation of the Eucharistic signs to the reality of Christ remains secured; but, unfortunately, a statically conceived real presence results. The later doctrinal affirmation of the Council of Trent must be interpreted from this standpoint. The council’s teaching on the subject of the somatic real presence favored a presence perceived statically. Nevertheless the council defined that in the Eucharistic event, and so in the Eucharistic gifts, Christ bestows himself on us. Hence there remains open the possibility, within the doctrine of Trent, to express the twofold dimension of the Eucharistic reality in terms of a relational-personal ontology. But this possibility was not available to theologians at that time.\(^\text{63}\) [italics mine]

Although, as Kilmartin states, the relational personal ontology was not an operative model at the time of the Eucharistic discourse during the Middle Ages, there remained room for a relational ontology which is the archetypical model as presented in this dissertation.

Understanding the Eucharistic Presence in the Post-modern World

Just as the Eucharistic presence has been addressed throughout the history of the Church in concepts and terms necessary to each age, so this dissertation challenges both Orthodox and Catholic to pursue a renewal in looking at the Eucharistic gifts and in presenting their reality to a post-modern world. The Eucharistic celebration as a joyful movement of love from God to the human race and the response of the faithful to this gratuitous offer of Divine Life is an image paramount within the Christian experience. The integrative and regenerative nature of the Eucharist lies at the root of the joyful proclamation of life lived in the risen Christ. The cosmic dance of the universe itself, finding its telos in the priestly ministry of the High Priest, offers its song of praise through the Eucharistic offering. Such imagery—manifested in ritual gesture, proclamation of the word, and the symbolic and metaphorical language of the church as it celebrates life in its fullest sense—is the sacramental celebration of the abundant life promised by Jesus. The divinization of the entire creation is operative here, the breaking through in time of the eschatological promise. Such imagery captures the sweeping dynamic of the Eucharistic meal as a true koinonia between God and humanity. With this holistic vision of the Eucharist, the church realizes its fullest manifestation of itself and consequently is most at home in statu patriae, when celebrating the Eucharist. It is within this sweeping dynamic liturgical experience and expression of the church that the Eucharistic gifts, as Gift and positioned within the matrix of theandric love, serve as our image of union with God.

This broader, all-encompassing theological vision, rooted in the lex orandi, is more aligned with and expressive of the early Patristic vision of both the Eastern and
Western traditions. A return to this Patristic vision of catholicity—catholicity in this sense meaning wholeness, integrity, nothing lacking, fullness in the broadest sense of the terms—can serve as a corrective principle in our task of moving toward a more integrative theological construct within which sacramental theology in general can prove beneficial. Catholic, καθόλος, in the Patristic sense, can mean the fullness of the faith as experienced and expressed “according to the whole” through the universal and overarching belief and sacramental construct characteristic of the catholic faith.

Our interest in the contribution of the Fathers and doctors of the church is of paramount importance since our theological ethos is not born out of or lived in a vacuum. The rule of lex orandi, lex credendi was normative for the Patristic writers since their theology is born out of a witness experienced in the holistic vision of liturgical worship. In returning to the mind of the Fathers, Fr. Alexander Schmemann reminds us that such a return to the Patristic sources must have a purpose. Schmemann proposes that we cannot simply repeat their theology in a sort of blind obedience or to believe that the Fathers had all of the answers or exhausted all theological possibilities. The purpose of our return to the Fathers is articulated by Schmemann in this way:

We return indeed to the Fathers, and not only to their “texts,” when we recover and make our experience of the Church not as mere “institution, doctrine or system,” to quote A. A. Khomiakov, but as the all-embracing, all-assuming and all-transforming life, the passage into the reality of redemption and transfiguration. This experience, as we tried to show, is centered in the Eucharist,
the Sacrament of the Church, the very manifestation and self-revelation of the Church.\textsuperscript{64}

Concurrent with Schmemann, Zizioulas also maintains that our return to the world and mind of the Patristic writers is essential:

…[a] return to the Fathers is a return to a theology rooted in the Church’s worship. Why is it that the Fathers are still able to “speak to all”? Zizioulas answers that the Fathers posed and resolved the “fundamental problems” in a way which gave theology “meaning and relevance” for the world of their time, a world shaped by Greek thought.” They are important to us because, he adds simply, “such remains our world still today.”\textsuperscript{65}

To this end, we here examine four aspects of the Eucharistic presence that provide background for a closer look at the thought of the three theologians with whom we will engage in detail: the call for a return to the notion of the ecclesial body as the primary locus for the Eucharistic presence, arising out of a more holistic view than is currently at the forefront of the catholic consciousness, and the Patristic notion of the Eucharist as symbol, as presented by Chauvet; the concept of the sacramental nature of all reality, as delineated by Schmemann, and the existential personalism of Christ present in the Eucharist, as propounded by Zizioulas.

\textsuperscript{64} Thomas Fisch, ed., \textit{Liturgy and Tradition: Theological Reflections of Alexander Schmemann} (Crestwood: SVS Press 1990), 85.

\textsuperscript{65} McPartlan, \textit{The Eucharist}, 127-128.
The Ecclesial Body: The Remedy for Individualism

[T]he risen body of Christ somehow embraces the whole universe, which has become the center of his self-expression and communication, name his body. Teilhard de Chardin grasped this point as if by intuition; “by virtue of Christ’s rising again, nothing any longer kills inevitable but everything is capable of becoming the blessed touch of the divine hands, the blessed influence of the will of God upon our lives.” Karl Rahner spoke of a relationship in which the universe is swept up to its fulfillment in and through the fulfillment of Christ. Leon-DuLafour spoke in similar terms. It is Christ’s historic body, distinguishing him from others and transformed by the resurrection, that plays an active, vital role in the transformation of the universe. 66

Representing the ecclesial strain of thought in its connection with the Eucharistic presence current in the Roman Church and in opposition to the radical individualism the dominates post-modern man, Chauvet demonstrates how the ecclesial body is the working out of the inter-personal dynamic of mutuality as an exchange of the gift of the superabundance of the grace of God, in and through the symbolic order of the Eucharistic celebration. For Chauvet, this ecclesial grace is understood in this relational and ecclesial dimension and is the very presence of God. In such an ecclesial existential-personalist theology, Christ’s mediation through the body of the church enables each participant to

66 McKenna, “Eucharistic Presence,” 298-299.
experience the transformative and liberating recognition of himself in relation to the “other.”

A Patristic Understanding of the Symbol and the World as Sacrament in Chauvet and Schmemann

Central also to Chauvet’s theology is his exploration of the inheritance of the Patristic mind relative to one of the most misunderstood terms in theological discourse: the symbol. The reason we can appeal to the Patristic understanding of the symbol is that it carries a certain insight into the world of the internal life of the church. The symbol is replete and full of meaning and diversity relative to what it conveys to the human experience; it is that medium which is by its very nature epiphanic, participatory, revelatory—it draws us to see, in a unique experiential way, that which we cannot see, to experience that which is normally beyond experience. The symbol invokes us to participate in a reality to which we are normally not privy, either in our intellectual world or experiential world, except by the power of the symbol. The symbolic worldview of the Patristic mind is the resource for our task at hand.

This return to the original concept of symbol, with all that implies, will be explored most fully in the theology of Louis-Marie Chauvet. Schmemann extends this notion by showing that the world itself, by virtue of its being a creation of God, possesses a certain symbolic character, for which his term is “sacramental.” This symbolic character was a given for the Fathers of the church; the world, by its nature, projects a sense of the holy as the very medium for our participation in divine life. For Schmemann, the world fulfills its ontological purpose as a foundation of divine revelation. In the thought of Schmemann, for the Patristic mind there is no sense of the
sacred vs. the profane, no opposition between the natural world and supernatural world. Such a dualistic world view is foreign to the holistic vision of the Fathers:

It is then the “natural” symbolism of the world—one can almost say its “sacramentality”—that makes the sacrament possible and constitutes the key to its understanding and apprehension. If the Christian sacrament is unique, it is not in the sense of being a miraculous exception to the natural order of things created by God and “proclaiming His glory.” Its absolute newness is not in its ontology as sacrament but in the specific “res” which it “symbolizes,” i.e., reveals, manifests, and communicates—which is Christ and His Kingdom.67

If the world itself is “sacrament,” it thereby naturally possesses a symbolic character which invites humanity to participate in the divine life. Such was the world view, the ethos, of the Patristic mind. Due to a certain devolution in the theological perspective of some thinkers within the church, the integrative nature of the symbolic began to lose its place in the consciousness of the church.

Gradually, however, the unfortunate dichotomy that was set up between symbol and reality impoverished medieval appreciation of the power of symbols to mediate reality. Such a development had particularly negative implications for liturgical and sacramental practice since, as ritual activity, worship is built of a complexus of symbols that interact in order to communicate meaning.68

67 Schmemann, *For the Life of the World*, 139-140.

68 Judith Marie Kubicki, “Recognizing the Presence of Christi in the Liturgical Assembly, *Theological Studies* 65, no. 4 (2004): 826. In the context of this dichotomy, Schmemann poses the question; “If the
This devolution is exhibited in the eventual collapse between the symbolic and real which became quite obvious in the Eucharistic controversies characteristic of the Middle Ages. Such controversies are where the concept of real presence of Christ in the Eucharist took center stage. In this period, the interpretation and application of the terms sign, symbol, sacrament etc. became confused which led to a deeper crisis of understanding.

When *symbol* lost its meaning as that which truly partakes in the reality, a consequence was the rise of illustrative symbolism which became characteristic of liturgical and sacramental piety. Through the ages, the liturgical celebration of the Eucharist moved conceptually from eschatological banquet to divine drama, in which the presence is not real, then what is it? Schmemann posits this question within the Eucharistic controversies of the medieval period to which he answers that the symbolic is the real: “To simplify our task, we can take as the starting point of this study the long and well known debate which dominates from beginning to end the development in the West of sacramental and, more especially, Eucharistic theology. It is the debate on the real presence. Nowhere indeed is better revealed the line dividing from one another the two approaches to the sacrament, as well as the reasons which led to the transformation of one into another. Within the context of that debate, the term ‘real’ clearly implies the possibility of another type of presence which therefore is not real. The term for that other presence in the Western intellectual and theological idiom is, we know, symbolical. We need not go here into the very complex and in many ways confused history of that term in Western thought. It is clear that in the common theological language as it takes shape between the Carolingian renaissance and the Reformation, and in spite of all controversies between rival theological schools, the ‘incompatibility between symbol and reality,’ between ‘figura et veritas’ is consistently affirmed and accepted. “To the ‘mystice, non vere’ corresponds not less exclusively ‘vere, non mystice.’” The Fathers and the whole early tradition, however – and we reach here the crux of the matter – not only do not know this distinction and opposition, but to them symbolism is the essential dimension of the sacrament, the proper key to its understanding. St. Maximus the Confessor, the sacramental theologian par excellence of the Patristic age, calls the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist symbols (“symbola”), images (“apeikonismata”) and mysteries (“mysteria”). “Symbolical” here is not only opposed to “real,” but embodies it as its very expression and mode of manifestation. Historians of theology, in their ardent desire to maintain the myth of theological continuity and orderly “evolution,” here again find their explanation “imprecision” of Patristic terminology. They do not seem to realize that the Fathers’ use of “symbolon” (and related terms) is not “vague” or “imprecise” but simply different from that of later theologians, and that the subsequent transformation of these terms constitutes indeed the source of one of the greatest theological tragedies. Schmemann, *For the Life of the World*, 138-139.
Earthly life of Jesus was reenacted through liturgical rites. The Eucharistic community gradually became divorced from its very essence as church. In this context, the church as sacrament in and through which the Risen Christ embraces humanity, entered rather into the distancing world of pseudo-symbolism which by its nature causes a dichotomy between liturgical celebration and life. For this reason the understanding of Eucharist as an experiential reality became less a personal encounter and more of a theatrical drama.

As a reason for this dilemma, Schmemann posits a divorce between the *lex orandi* and *lex credendi* which, for Schmemann, lies at the root of virtually all liturgical and theological distortion. Schmemann maintains that the practice of ascribing certain “symbolic” meanings to the various liturgical actions and rites of the liturgy within both the Byzantine and Western traditions was a result of the loss of reality from the definition of *symbol* and the liturgy’s being perceived as a “sacred play” or drama. In this paradigm, the worshippers are absorbed into the drama and ultimately relegated to the role of passive observers rather than believing participants in the salvific message of the liturgy.

The result of this phenomenon is that the intimacy of relationality as a mutual embrace between God and his people as *personal encounter* gives way to the distance of observation on the part of the members of the church. This downplays the perspective that “…sacraments are symbols arising from the ministry of Jesus Christ and continued in and through the Church, which when received in faith, are encounters with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”

---

69 Worgul, *From Magic to Metaphor*, 123.
Addressing the transformative nature of Eucharistic presence requires categories of thinking in line with the culture, such as existential personalism and its commensurate categories, as is favored by Zizioulas. Operating on the basic premise that there is an experience of divine presence in a multiplicity of ways on both the vertical and horizontal dimensions of human existence within the Eucharistic celebration, these existential personalistic categories attempt to speak of the transformative nature of Eucharistic presence in a holistic fashion. Essential in treating the Eucharistic presence along the lines of existential personalism is exploring the nature of how the transformative character of the presence of Christ comes about, by treating His presence as an experience of renewal, re-integration, and fulfillment. William Thompson notes that humans relate on four fundamental levels of existence:

…I would propose that we probe Jesus’ contribution to four cardinal dimensions of our common human life: (1) our relation to the Divine, (2) our vision and praxis as individuals, (3) our network of social relationships, ranging from the more interpersonal kinds of family, marriage, and friendship, to the less personal kinds characteristic of our larger political, economic, and cultural environment, and (4) our relationship to the natural environment and our very material body which positions us within the ecological habitat.  

All of these dimensions or levels of human existence are embraced in the overarching transformative dialectic between God, as the one who saves and redeems, and

---

humanity as the recipients of grace in the experience of common human life of those who are redeemed. This divine grace is none other than our participation in the very life of God. Through this intimate relationship with the person of Christ, we are transformed—remade in the likeness of Christ, as attested in the writings of the Fathers, particularly Athanasius, Cyril, and Gregory of Nazianzus: humanity, created in the image of God, though fallen, by cooperative growth in the Holy Spirit and in the body of Christ, aspires to God’s likeness, the ultimate effect of Christ’s death on the cross.

A consideration of the Eucharist in this light includes the idea of *theosis*, or divinization. Through more prominent in Eastern Christianity, this concept—that each Christian is remade in the likeness of his creator—is found in both East and West. It is by God’s gift, through the incarnate Logos and the power of the Holy Spirit that the divine image is manifest in each which subsequently enables humanity to participate in God’s divine nature (2 Peter 1:3). This participation in the divine possesses a certain asceticism on the part of the believer, as is evidenced in the work of Zizioulas. In Zizioulan terms, the human is called to undergo a certain anthropological shift from biological life to the life of the *ekklesia*, a transformation of the person from mere biological existence to that of the “catholic person” or catholic personhood, that is *personhood kata holos*. The catholic person is that person who has been initiated and confirmed in the life of God and as one who is redeemed Jesus Christ. It is by this understanding of an existential personalism in and through Christ that humanity is made whole again. This transformation takes place within the celebration of the mystery of the Eucharist, as the church, gathered as the people of God, are engaged by the risen Christ.
The Eucharist as the Ground of Unity Between Catholic and Orthodox

The faithful of both Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches have, throughout history, expressed a particular love of the Eucharist in its expression as sacrament. What is this sacramental love? What in the Eucharist as sacrament may bring these churches to unity? How can each of these churches recognize their broad and general areas of agreement in Eucharistic sacramental theology and practice? What part of sacramental love can be appealed to that encourages and even demands dialogue? Articulating common Eucharistic theories and practices shared by the Catholic and Orthodox traditions in great detail is beyond the scope of this work. However, we can here examine points of agreement that may serve to set the tone for exploring further issues. In pursuing unity, I believe that the Eucharistic love found in both churches must serve as the common ground for any theological discussion between the Catholic and Orthodox churches.

The Orthodox and Catholic churches have a long, complex, and diverse, common history of both agreement and disagreement, the latter especially concerning ecclesiology. The theological dialogue between these churches today shows signs of hope, however, because it is less centered on the divisiveness of ecclesial power and more on the unity each church sees reflected in the other in Eucharistic theology. Each of these traditions maintains the principle that the Eucharist makes the church and the church makes the Eucharist. This dialogical point may prove the most helpful in assisting theologians with crafting a framework for unity. Notably, each church teaches that by nature, the church is a living community enlivened by a Eucharistic consciousness that has developed over time, and shaped by scripture, philosophy, and theology, and by
culture itself. The theories and practices within the living community of each tradition speak of a certain kind of accepted plurality legitimate to, within, and between each tradition.

One of the main tasks that challenges theologians today is to return to a holistic approach to the Eucharist, to the view that the Eucharist embodies and engages every aspect of the Christian life and experience, and is not dichotomized as an element of the church that is set apart and is separate. Many theologians today no longer view the Eucharist in this restrictive sense, as if the Eucharist takes upon itself an identity unrelated to every aspect of the church. If the premise that “the Eucharist makes the church and the church makes the Eucharist” is true, then theologians can begin to understand that the Eucharist never stands in isolation over and against the church. With this view, the divisiveness of power ecclesiology may be challenged; and, given this common ground of Eucharistic love, some of the common theories and practices between the two traditions emerge.

In referencing the celebration of the Eucharist, both traditions share a common vision rooted in the ecclesial consciousness characteristic of the early Church, which continues to be expressed by both Churches in contemporary experience. With regard to ecclesiology, such a consciousness is based on the Ignatian model which specifies a calling-forth of the people of God (laos tou theou) as Church in koinonia, gathered around the bishop in Eucharistic celebration. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, writes, “The content of the Eucharist, what happens in it, is the uniting of Christians, bringing them from their state of separation into the unity of the One Bread and the One Body. The Eucharist is thus understood entirely in a dynamic ecclesiological
perspective. It is the living process through which, time and again, the Church’s activity of becoming the Church takes place.”

This ecclesial consciousness finds its source and goal within the celebration of the Paschal meal in and through which believers experience the life of the risen Christ. It is Christ who calls the *ekklesia* to share in his life, to eat and drink his body and blood, and to gift the ecclesial community with participation in his life. The Eucharistic celebration seals the covenantal inheritance of union between humanity and God. Christ’s presence is a fulfillment not only of his promise but of his very nature as the Son of God.

The practice of the Eucharistic gathering on the Lord’s Day, characteristic of the primitive Christian community and practiced as the normative expression of the Church’s identity, remains the common practice of these two traditions. Essential to the commonality between these two traditions is the firm conviction that the risen Christ is mystically present to the people of God in his self-offering and that the members of the church, participating in His self-offering by their self-offering, commune with the body and blood of the risen Christ. Both Catholics and Orthodox believe that through the divine initiative of Christ, the members of the church are invited to “taste and see that the Lord is good.”

In addition to the presence of the risen Christ both traditions hold, unequivocally, that what is received in the Eucharistic gifts, is truly the body and blood of the risen Christ. As we have seen in the brief historical summary earlier in this chapter, the two


72 Psalm 34:8.
traditions have differed somewhat concerning the theological meanings and nuances of what is meant by the body and blood of Christ. Nevertheless, both churches, working within their own paradigms and constructs, speak of a shared vision rooted within a common experiential base and grounded in the celebration of the Lord’s Day. Such a common experiential base can offer much to the dialogue between the two churches.

Further commonalities of both traditions rest in the fact that both share a basic common “ordo,” which shapes the Eucharistic liturgical life. From the Eucharistic celebration arises a liturgical vision of the cycle of time shared by each of the traditions, each understanding that the intersection of *kairotic* time with chronological time is indicative of the incarnational and eschatological aspects of liturgical Eucharistic worship. From this intersection of times, each tradition observes a liturgical cycle of celebrations, dedicated to Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the saints, and all connected to the Eucharistic celebration. Such a common vision of the liturgical *ordo* can only serve as a point of mediation between the two traditions, especially where there exist critical theological and experiential aspects of the celebration of the Eucharist that are experienced in love.

As we have seen in this chapter, the road to unity is beset with various theological and philosophical challenges, as evidenced in the long and laborious history, regarding the multi-leveled understandings and misunderstandings of Eucharistic presence. No Eucharistic theology can be developed and articulated within a vacuum. The task of facing numerous challenges like those of the Middle Ages and the responses of the august efforts of the Scholastics in their theology is no less critical today than it has ever been. Although the challenges and responses before us may be framed within a worldview
quite unlike that of our predecessors, a response that maintains a “theology of presence” is critical within the parameters of and in fidelity to the orthodox catholic faith. In the chapters to follow, an exploration of the contemporary challenges set before us and responses to those challenges from Chauvet, Schmemann, and Zizioulas will be offered as a contribution to the dialogue.
CHAPTER TWO: CHAUVET ON THE EUCHARISTIC PRESENCE

This chapter will present some key insights and contributions from Louis-Marie Chauvet, a prominent and creative theologian in sacramental theology. Chauvet’s insights will be presented and analyzed within the broader dialogue regarding Eucharistic presence. Chauvet has contributed immensely to post-modern theological development, especially through his works *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence* and *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body*, *The Liturgy of the Body*, as well as through numerous articles and publications. Chauvet is engaged in a working dialogue with of a variety of disciplines including, but not limited to, the theories of Heidegger, Lucan, Levinas, Ricoeur, Derrida, et al., as well as drawing upon contemporary insights of anthropology, phenomenology, and other disciplines.

Fundamental to Chauvet’s theological/philosophical posture in sacramental theology is his call for contemporary theology to understand that sacramental theology, as it developed within the Scholastic period, specifically with Aquinas and others, worked within a metaphysical system proved most valuable theology and philosophy at that time. Such a framework of thinking—what Chauvet calls a “logic of presuppositions”—coupled with the philosophical terminology of that era provided a way for theology to express the mystery of faith. According to Chauvet, Aquinas’s treatment of the mystery of grace provides a good example. Based on Aristotelian/Hellenistic thought and rooted in a metaphysic of causality, Aquinas naturally explained grace in productionist terms, rather than as a “gift” of encounter. Although Chauvet acknowledges that such an understanding of grace was expressed through the medium of analogy rather
than by means of exhaustive explanation, he questions why Aquinas and other Scholastics did not find more adequate analogical language whereby they might speak of grace as a “gift” and not in productionist terms that would eventually lead to the reification of grace. Chauvet’s response is simple: “The Scholastics were unable to think otherwise: they were prevented from doing so by the onto-theological presuppositions which structured their entire culture.”

…Regis Duffy has argued that, since Aquinas, the church has suffered from difficulty in thinking symbolically. For example, no where could this be seen more clearly than in the explanations using causality and how it works in Eucharistic theology since the Middle Ages. …Sacramentality has been fixed in certain forms, most particularly in the seven specific sacraments, but also in ways of thinking about the sacred, that rule out its potential to be revealed in new or seemingly inappropriate places. Over the course of history, the constricted form of thinking has most often been expressed in dualisms: of soul/body, sacred/secular, spiritual/material, male/female. … Overwhelmingly, one of the dual realities is valued over the other. This has been the dominating tendency in the history of Roman Catholic theology [as well as in recent Orthodox Christian experience] as the sacred/sacramental comes to be valued over the secular/profane/natural. …[T]he sacramental takes on a life of its own, detached

73 Chauvet, Symbol and Sacrament, 7-8. Here we see an example of Chauvet’s contention that the language of faith is formed within a cultural context.

74 As maintained by Alexander Schmemann throughout his theological works, Orthodox Christianity, especially within the Slavic tradition, has suffered from what he calls a “Western captivity” which is indicative of the same dualistic tendencies as expressed by Duffy and Ross.
from its natural and historic roots, and lacking its multivalent meanings. In Weberian terms, the sacred becomes routinized.\textsuperscript{75}

At the heart of Chauvet’s criticisms of Scholastic sacramental theology is the notion of the mediation of God through the sacramental order within the confines of an onto-theological framework. Within this metaphysical framework, the fabric of reality, even “being” (according to Heidegger), is structured and confined to the definitive and explainable. Central to Chauvet’s thought is the idea that today, sacramental theology requires a shift from the causal, mechanistic, instrumentalist, productionist dynamics of Scholastic metaphysical onto-theology to a sacramental theology of the symbolic order and a renewed understanding of the symbol.\textsuperscript{76}

In order to bring about this renewed understanding, Chauvet calls for a renewed understanding of the power of the symbolic to mediate the presence and absence of God. This interplay regarding presence and absence is a central notion for Chauvet. Our relationship with God as the “Other” and the concept of the absence allows humans the freedom to break out of the confines of extreme individualism and subjectivism, of a fixation with identity, and opens up the possibility of a reciprocal relationship between the Trinitarian God and humanity.

\textsuperscript{75} Susan A. Ross, Extravagant Affairs: A Feminist Sacramental Theology (New York: Continuum, 1998), 40.

With regard to the sacramental/Eucharistic presence, Chauvet proposes that the relational presence of Christ, as celebrated within the community of faith, is experienced by the faithful through the symbolic order. Believers enter the presence of Christ within the broad context of liturgical rite and celebration. Christ’s presence precedes our presence, and it is through his initiative that the church receives life. The mystery of baptism, our incorporation into the ecclesial body of Christ, places us within the linguistic framework of the symbolic order, which embraces us and informs us of the presence of the risen Christ.

The ecclesial dimension of the revelation and celebration is crucial to Chauvet’s theology: the sacraments are rooted in the ecclesial experience of the community through which God’s salvific love is manifest. In order to illustrate what he means by the ecclesial dimension of the presence and absence of God, Chauvet recalls the narrative of the risen Christ and the meeting of two disciples on the road to Emmaus, as detailed in a later section.

Finally, this chapter analyzes the sacraments from the perspective of the language of symbolic exchange. The symbol by nature is that medium where one party makes a pact or covenant with another party, and the recognition of the other through the dynamic of the symbol is central to Chauvet’s understanding of symbol. This symbolic exchange carries not an economic value in the contractual relationship, but allows for the dynamic of mutual recognition and the emergence of inter-subjectivity.

____________________

Theology Within the “Old” Metaphysical Framework

The Logical Presuppositions of Scholasticism

In this section, I will examine a few of the theological presuppositions of Scholasticism from the wide spectrum of methodologies and theological and philosophical mindsets of the Middle Ages. As addressed by Chauvet, these presuppositions bring to light a certain awareness that may prove helpful for theologians today, who must also be aware of the presuppositions dominating our contemporary setting.

One of the fundamental points Chauvet makes throughout his work is that the scholastics of the Middle Ages were working within the a metaphysical framework inherited from and characterized by an Aristotelian foundation. As Chauvet maintains, the great scholastics were not able to think within any other framework. Chauvet maintains that the mindset and methodology of the scholastics ultimately arise from the fact that they “…were prevented from [thinking differently] by the onto-theological presuppositions which structured their entire culture.”

Chauvet cites Heidegger’s notion concerning the “…foundational ways of thinking that aim at explaining the totality of being.” Another example of the limitations of scholasticism’s presuppositions is the logic inherent within the scholastic framework (inherited from Greek philosophy) that lends itself to the notion that all entities are moving toward a _telos_, a purposeful end. Such a teleological approach, by its very nature, presupposes that indeed there exists such...

---

78 Chauvet, _Symbol and Sacrament_, 8.

79 Ibid., 8.
an end and that any entity will find its ultimate purpose when that end is reached. Herein lies one of the many stumbling blocks for Chauvet because he finds such thinking limiting in its very nature. Any entity that is posited within a limiting external framework, and defined by such a framework, is ultimately subject to a pre-existing structure which leaves no room for development and growth. In other words, any entity can be ultimately reduced to an “object,” thus compromising the dynamic inter-subjectivity based on a relational model of inter-personal dynamics. Such a basis is a hallmark of Chauvet’s work and, as will be demonstrated in chapter 4 of this dissertation, that of John Zizioulas as well.

The question then arises: Does Chauvet propose that metaphysics or the metaphysical be entirely rejected as a framework for theological discourse? One could ask if such a rejection is even possible given the great impact that such an approach has and continues to have in philosophical and theological development. Chauvet maintains that the task at hand is not to replace traditional metaphysics with another construct, as replacing the old with the new, but to begin to work from “another epistemological terrain for our thinking activity.” For Chauvet, the language of the symbolic order will prove to be a crucial constituent of the new horizon in theological language.

In his critique of classic onto-theology, Chauvet shows appreciation for the metaphysicians within the Christian tradition and comments on the dilemma faced by these theologians:

80 Ibid., 9.
The truly great metaphysicians have continually attempted to go beyond the limits of this metaphysics, and thus to overcome these inherent conceptual constraints. Like a conspiratorial wink, the oion ("such as") of Plotinus, the quasi ("similar to") of the Latin thinkers alert the hearers or readers that they should not be duped into thinking that they are in possession of a transcription of the real into language. For Thomas, the very notion of esse ("being") plays a critical role as a corrective to any reductive portrait of God to the extent that this esse, uncircumscribed or without limit, is not included in any "genus." Thus, the great thinkers have always known how to take a step backwards, a step of humble lucidity before the truly, a step which has protected them from falling into deadly dogmatism or confusing their thought with the real. On occasion, they have even explicitly reflected on this disparity. But to ponder such a disparity is one thing; to take this disparity as a point of departure and as a framework for one’s thought is another. This lack of interest in exploring the bias of their unconscious assumptions is what gives these thinkers a “family resemblance” and allows us to speak of the “metaphysics” or better still, the metaphysical.81

Most important here is that while Chauvet recognizes that the great scholastics were aware of the limitations of words/language in communicating the mystery of the Divine,

81 Ibid., 8.
the problem is that the springboard for their theology became normative because of their presuppositions, which were not called into question.82

The notion of grace must rank high as one of those complex theological issues that, throughout the centuries, has experienced a certain metamorphosis within the construct of ecclesial language, experience, and liturgical celebration. Theologically speaking, grace (χαρις) still presents a challenge to theologians. Contemporary theologian Karl Rahner was able, with profound theological acumen, to delve into the various notions of grace as they have been represented throughout the centuries and to reinterpret, among other things, as ultimately God’s giving of Himself, His very life, to humanity.

Using the notion of grace as treated by Aquinas, Chauvet has chosen to exemplify the transformation that took place within the tradition of the Church in its attempt to expound on grace’s nature, source, and efficacy for the recipient, and on how this grace is communicated or bestowed through the sacramental life of the Church. Chauvet’s choice

---

82 Joseph A. Bracken, “Toward a New Philosophical Theology Based on Intersubjectivity,” Theological Studies 59 (1998): 705-719. It is worth noting that Chauvet is not without criticism regarding his treatment of metaphysics. Chauvet’s position is questioned by Joseph A. Bracken who contends that metaphysics need not be eliminated from the methodology of theology; rather, metaphysics needs to be seen in a new light or logic; the logic of intersubjectivity. This new epistemological terrain is characterized by an attempt to develop a foundation for doing theology which will challenge a certain “unconscious logic” which has been operative for centuries; an epistemology based on a new terrain characterized by a theology of intersubjectivity:

...a theoretical scheme grounded in universal subjectivity (which) should be open and incomplete since its ultimate components are by definition interrelated subjects of experience in process of development rather than fixed objects of thought within an a priori causal scheme (as in classical metaphysics.). Universality or metaphysical generality should, moreover, still be present in this new philosophical theology based on intersubjectivity, but with the qualification that objectivity is grounded in habit or repetition of pattern among subjects of experience rather than in fixed essences within a pre-given causal scheme.

In light of Bracken’s critique of Chauvet’s position, it will be demonstrated later in this chapter how Chauvet will approach the metaphysical dilemma in a creative discourse within the conversation at hand as he critiques the metaphysics as onto-theology earlier, as well as contemporary theologies.
of grace as an example is deliberate because the explanation of grace eventually fell victim to the instrumentalist/productionist approach to the sacramental life characteristic of the Middle Ages. The vestiges of this way of thinking are still operative within contemporary sacramental theology and practice. Because of the vast theological landscape centered on grace, our focus will be limited to some basic aspects of grace as understood by Aquinas and the scholastics.

Note the causal language of Aquinas in the following pericope from the *Summa Theologiae*, as he treats whether the sacraments are the cause of grace. He first presents the objections: the sacraments are the sign of grace, not the cause; since something corporeal cannot act on something spiritual, and because the human mind is spiritual, the corporeal sacrament does not cause grace; and because it is proper to God to cause grace, the sacraments cannot because they consist of words and created matter. Then he answers, as follows:

We must needs say that in some way the sacraments of the New Law cause grace. For it is evident that through the sacraments of the New Law man is incorporated with Christ: thus the Apostle says of Baptism (Galatians 3:27): "As many of you as have been baptized in Christ have put on Christ." And man is made a member of Christ through grace alone.

....

We must therefore say ... that an efficient cause is twofold, principal and instrumental. The principal cause works by the power of its form, to which form the effect is likened; just as fire by its own heat makes something hot. In this way none but God can cause grace: since grace is nothing else than a participated
likeness of the Divine Nature, according to 2 Peter 1:4: "He hath given us most
great and precious promises; that we may be [Vulgate: 'you may be made']
partakers of the Divine Nature." But the instrumental cause works not by the
power of its form, but only by the motion whereby it is moved by the principal
agent: so that the effect is not likened to the instrument but to the principal agent:
for instance, the couch is not like the axe, but like the art which is in the
craftsman's mind. And it is thus that the sacraments of the New Law cause grace:
for they are instituted by God to be employed for the purpose of conferring grace.
Hence Augustine says (Contra Faust. xix): "All these things," viz. pertaining to
the sacraments, "are done and pass away, but the power," viz. of God, "which
works by them, remains ever." Now that is, properly speaking, an instrument by
which someone works: wherefore it is written (Titus 3:5): "He saved us by the
laver of regeneration."

…. The principal cause cannot properly be called a sign of its effect, even though
the latter be hidden and the cause itself sensible and manifest. But an instrumental
cause, if manifest, can be called a sign of a hidden effect, for this reason, that it is
not merely a cause but also in a measure an effect in so far as it is moved by the
principal agent. And in this sense the sacraments of the New Law are both cause
and signs. Hence, too, is it that, to use the common expression, "they effect what
they signify." From this it is clear that they perfectly fulfill the conditions of a
sacrament; being ordained to something sacred, not only as a sign, but also as a
cause.
An instrument has a twofold action; one is instrumental, in respect of which it works not by its own power but by the power of the principal agent: the other is its proper action, which belongs to it in respect of its proper form: thus it belongs to an axe to cut asunder by reason of its sharpness, but to make a couch, in so far as it is the instrument of an art. But it does not accomplish the instrumental action save by exercising its proper action: for it is by cutting that it makes a couch. In like manner the corporeal sacraments by their operation, which they exercise on the body that they touch, accomplish through the Divine institution an instrumental operation on the soul; for example, the water of baptism, in respect of its proper power, cleanses the body, and thereby, inasmuch as it is the instrument of the Divine power, cleanses the soul: since from soul and body one thing is made. And thus it is that Augustine says (Gen. ad lit. xii) that it "touches the body and cleanses the heart."\(^{83}\)

One can see how easily the paradigm presented here lends itself to an eventual reification of grace and how the sacramental actions of the church become a mechanistic medium for the transmission of grace as a quantitative entity. Chauvet proposes that grace fell victim to what he characterizes as “the productionist scheme of representation”: To explain the specificity of the sacraments in comparison with other means of mediating God’s grace, one must say that they effect what they signify. But according to what modality?

For Thomas, only one is possible: causality. He underlines this conviction in the *Summa*. The terms chosen to explain this characteristic of the sacraments in part III, question 62, entitled “The Principal Effect of the Sacraments Which Is Grace,” are significant: sacraments “cause grace,” they “work” or “produce” it, the “contain” it, they “add to” grace considered in general a “certain divine assistance.” They are “necessary to produce certain special effects that the Christian life requires,” they “confer grace,” they derive their “virtue producing (causativa) grace” from the Passion of Christ. The whole question is conceived according to the model of an “instrument.” Of course, Thomas reminds us repeatedly that he is using this only as an analogy. This has been true from the first article on his treatise on the sacraments; for from the start he maintains that it is only by analogy that the sacraments can be grouped under the genus of “sign.”

Chauvet contends that even though Thomas’s proposal admits that grace and the sacraments were understood in terms of analogy, the underlying metaphysical construct of cause and effect, which permeated the philosophical/theological atmosphere of the day, is a notion to be dealt with and that its consequences relate to sacramental theology in general:

However, even when purified by the reminder that it is only an analogy, these terms all serve to build up an ever-present *scheme* of representation that we call *technical or productionist*. From this comes the question we posed at the start of this chapter: How did it come about that, when speaking about the gracious relation of God to humankind, Thomas restricted himself to this sort of

---

representation? The answer suggested above pointed us in the direction of his unconscious (and uncriticized) onto-theological propositions. ...because of its distinctive metaphysical bent (in the sense discussed above), Western thought is unable to represent to itself the relations between subjects of subjects with God in any way other than on according to a technical model of cause and effect. 85

Chauvet’s Critique of Metaphysics as Onto-Theology and Call for a New Horizon

Tracing metaphysical ontology, its language and inner logic (which Chauvet characterizes as a *logic of the same*) as inherited from Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, Chauvet maintains that, within this framework, the relation between humanity and God, the cause and effect paradigm, becomes normative in theological discourse. This penchant for instrumentality and causality generates a theological outlook that undermines the dynamic of an inter-personal, symbolic order, which, Chauvet holds, evokes a much deeper and authentic expression of the God-human dynamic. The instrumental/causal model must, according to Chauvet, be met and analyzed within a new horizon of the *symbolic order*, which offers a much greater opportunity for a sacramental theology today.

Chauvet’s Appeal to Heidegger’s Notion of Being

Here we must pause to consider: can we ever escape the *metaphysical*, which Chauvet characterizes as our *mother tongue*, inherited from the conscious as well as unconscious presuppositions of past philosophies/theologies? Or, to put it in Chauvet’s

85 Ibid., 22.
terms, “We will have pitched our tent in a different location, but on essentially the same terrain.” What is called for then, is not an attempt to replace the old with the new, as mentioned earlier in this dissertation, but to place ourselves in the locus of a new terrain which can provide us with a whole new vantage point in sacramental theology particularly with regard to Eucharist presence.

What might this new terrain look like? Throughout *Symbol and Sacrament*, Chauvet appeals to some insights relative to Heidegger’s thoughts on metaphysics in general and the notion of *being* in particular. It is well beyond the scope of this dissertation to engage Heidegger on any level other than that which is necessary to illustrate a few select points in the larger dialogue offered by Chauvet regarding sacramentality and methodology:

Chauvet claims that there is a “homology of attitudes” between Heidegger’s anthropological thinking and contemporary theological anthropology. The relation between a human subject (“Dasein”) and Being is homologous to the relation of the believer to God. God’s presence to the believer is thought of in a similar thinking pattern to that of Heidegger’s thinking the manifestation of Being, which is also and at the same time the withdrawal of Being, i.e., in revealing God constantly withdraws. For, with Heidegger, Chauvet accepts that, because of the fact that Being always has already withdrawn, we are left, abandoned in a historically determined particular context. As such, we are

---

86 Ibid., 47.
embedded in a narrativity which is anterior to our identity; we belong to a symbolic order that irreducibly surrounds and determines us.  

The withdrawal of Being and the resultant abandonment of Being as being opens for us a new point of reference and theological horizon for the creative work of Chauvet regarding presence and absence, as will be developed further in this chapter.

Chauvet also offers insights from Heidegger relative to the “ongoing confusion between the entity and being.” According to Heidegger, metaphysics “… has always proceeded ‘from a revelation of being,’ but it has remained ‘unaware of this revelation.’” The technological world in which we live has brought metaphysics to a certain level and in dialogue with a worldview which is centered on the notion of Being within a technocratic worldview:

Technology … brings to completion the metaphysical stage of the world, a world viewed as a “picture” and “representation,” which unfolded at the start of the modern period. From now on, Being is reduced to a mere “capital” always at the disposal of humankind, to a “reservoir of energy,” “entrusted” to the dominating subjectivity which “posits” (stellen) it and manages it for humankind’s own service.

87 Boeve and Ries (eds), The Presence of Transcendence, 23-24.

88 Chauvet, Symbol and Sacrament, 47.

89 Ibid., 49-50.
Briefly, Heidegger’s assessment that Being has come to be understood as capital to be used by humans demonstrates the crystallization that Being and reality itself has been subjected to throughout the history of philosophy. Being, seen essentially as a defined reality, permanent in its essence and hence attainable through the exercise of metaphysical operations, ceases to be an open-ended reality evocative in nature. Being is reduced to the intelligible world which we humans demand of Being itself and to the very methodologies which we employ that will enable us to “corral” the notion of what it is to “be.” In the traditional linguistic construct of the notion of God, for example, terms such as “the first cause,” “ultimate reality,” the “Unmoved Mover” of Aristotle, etc., fall short: the notion or idea of God is placed within a manageable scheme of “the real,” the “absolute,” the “necessary being,” thus open to human manipulation and subjected to a certain “logic” which serves as a tool for defining and categorizing being, as if being itself has self-imposed limitations by its very nature. As such, Being/God becomes subjected to the category of objectification, weighed down, even betrayed, and divested of its ultimate meaning which is manifested in the notion of mystery and gift:

Against the invading objectification of things by representation, calculation, and planning, the poet is the one who reminds us of the Openness of being in which we must maintain ourselves; thereby the poet opens to us the Sacred, which is the space of the play of being and of the risk of openness, where the gods may come near to us….There is, in Heidegger, a discourse of grace (in the deliberately ambiguous senses of “by grace” and “about” grace), which seems to sum up for us his entire approach. For Being, without either measure or calculation, without explanation of justification (“The rose is without a why? It blooms because it
blooms”) is pure grace, pure gift. More precisely: it is pure donation of the “given which give only its donation but which, in thus giving itself, hold itself back and eludes us.” This movement of donation can only be welcomed graciously in an attitude of “letting-enter-into-presence,” where the accent falls not on the presence itself but on the letting as “letting the coming-into-presence.”

Heidegger wrests the notion of Being from the clutches of objectification and, as posited by Chauvet, requires us to “show respect for the mystery of Being.” Carrying this notion to the idea of God, one can surmise within the Heideggerian construct that the objectification of God, based on onto-theology, ultimately presents the temptation for calculation, manipulation, and explanation. Critical to this line of thought is that the God of onto-theology can also be relegated to the attainable through philosophical and/or theological methodologies.

For Heidegger, when he speaks about the notion of presence, there remains inherent within the idea of presence the complementary and necessary correlative of absence. In Christian terms, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the God of Jesus Christ is a God who reveals and withdraws, is imminent yet transcendent. This absence of God, the existential “space” between humanity and God, opens a vista, a new horizon for the reciprocity between Divine Mystery and humanity:

---

90 Ibid., 60-61.

91 Ibid., 61.
“[T]his absence is not nothing; it is the presence of the hidden plentitude of what...is” and what the Greeks, the Hebrew prophets, and Jesus named “the divine.” It bears a “no more” which in itself is a “not yet,” the “not yet” of the “hidden coming of its inexhaustible being.” The question of God can thus be thought about only by starting from this “absence of the god” which “not a deficiency,” as Holderlin suggests. Thought must here make a new path for itself, which “is at best a country path, one which not only speaks of renunciation but has already renounced the pretensions of a doctrine claiming authority or of a worthy cultural work or of a great achievement of the spirit.” Finally, what we must do is to attempt to consider “the concern of the poet,” which is this: “To be without fear before the apparent absence of the god, not to run away but, starting from this relation to the absent god, remain in a mature proximity to the absence long enough to safeguard the word which at the beginning names the High One.”

It is precisely this notion of the absence of God, which takes a multitude of forms and expressions, that proves critical to Chauvet’s theology as he traverses the new theological horizon relative to Eucharist presence and the complex historical and theological circumstances that set the stage for his work. In the next section, we will examine how Chauvet addresses the notion of sacramental presence and absence relative

\[92\]

\[92\] Ibid., 62.
to the Eucharist and how this dynamic proves efficacious in the inner dialogue between humanity and God:

Emptiness is not nothing: the absence is precisely the place from which humans can come to their truth by overcoming all the barriers of objectifying and calculating reason. This task is burdensome. Is there anything more difficult than to hold oneself in such a “mature proximity to the absence of the god,” than to agree to this “presence of absence”? Moreover, this is a test that we do not choose for ourselves, embarked as we are on life, because the God whose absence we let die revives this absence within us as an excruciatingly painful wound.  

It is through the mediation of the “symbolic” that this inner dialogue finds its expression and celebration.

Drawing on Heidegger’s philosophy, Chauvet invites his readers to examine the Eucharistic presence according to several major themes. These include 1) thinking of the Eucharistic celebration in terms of both presence and absence; 2) understanding that in approaching the Eucharist, we are in the presence of one who is wholly “Other”; 3) recovering the notion of the assembly of the faithful as vital to the Eucharistic presences; and 4) finally—and perhaps most important—understanding that we have lost an understanding of the symbolic and that its recovery may be vital in presenting the reality of the Eucharist to postmodern man. We turn now to an examination of each of these aspects.

93 Ibid., 63.
Applying Chauvet’s Foundational Concepts to Eucharistic Presence

Sacramental Presence and Absence in the Eucharistic Celebration

In turning to the notion of presence as absence, Chauvet introduces the concept of Christ’s presence as marked by absence. As illustrated earlier in this chapter, absence, as understood within the context of Chauvet’s theory, is “not nothing.” Indeed, the absence of which Chauvet speaks is the guarantor of a certain ground of existential freedom that allows God to offer himself freely as gift and us humans to assent freely to his gift of self-offering. This absence provides us humans with the possibility to liberate ourselves from any objectification of God, of the Eucharistic, etc., because it is within this absence that any idolization of what we conceive and profess as God, or what is even relative to the Eucharistic elements, is safeguarded. It is in this vein that Chauvet posits that “… the Eucharistic presence of Christ, [is] the most threatened with idolatrous perversion among the faith’s mediations, however the most exemplary icon of the otherness and precedence of Christ, Lord of the Church.”94

Also noteworthy is Chauvet’s contention that even as Christ is revealed to us as that which is most near and present to our reality, yet crucial to this nearness or immediacy is a correlative of the difference of Christ, his “otherness,” if you will. In addressing presence and absence, Chauvet clarifies a point in the conversation. One might think that presence and absence are, as Chauvet puts it, “like two sides of a piece of paper.” Chauvet explains otherwise:

94 Ibid., 403.
Let us be more precise: in the symbolic order, presence and absence are not two complete realities that would be dialectically inseparable, a little like two sides of a piece of paper – they do not form two countable entities. They are not bivalent but form one ambivalent reality. 95

Ambivalence, on this plane, is welcome. The mystery of the Eucharist is by nature ambivalent and paradoxical. If it were not so, the necessary tension or, in Chauvet’s term the “resistance,” 96 characteristic of sacraments in general, of the dialectic between that which is given and yet concealed, grasped but beyond our grasp, would relegate Eucharistic presence to the category of onto-theology. Furthermore, for Chauvet, it is crucial to maintain the notion of the presence-of-the-absence of God, particularly in the Eucharist, in order to preserve the integrity of the pneumatological and eschatological character of the Eucharist. It is, after all, by the Holy Spirit that the risen Christ is revealed, and it is by the Holy Spirit that the gifts of the bread and wine become His body and blood. Eschatologically speaking, the faithful wait in hopeful expectation of that which is to come, the kingdom of God and, in the Eucharistic celebration, Christ himself. In this cloud of absence, each of these realities escape our grasp; they remain on the level of the initiative of God, and in this absence we are enabled the openness to receive that “which is from above,” independent of our creative forces or imaginations. It

95 Ibid., 404.
96 Ibid., 401.
is the God who reveals yet withdrawals, his withdrawal providing the very ground for our
growth in him.

To further illustrate his point of presence and absence, Chauvet maintains that a
presence is inscribed but not circumscribed. Chauvet recalls the Old Testament imagery
of the Ark of the Covenant:

In the Bible this somewhere is first of all the propitiatory seat which, on the Ark
of the Covenant, is flanked by two cherubim with their wings extended and
joined. The one whom the psalmist addressing in saying ‘You are seated between
the cherubim’ indeed has a seat there, in this eminently inscribed space; but this
space is open, the throne is empty. It is by mode of open space that the Glory of
God inhabits this place, just as it is by mode of chiaroscuro that God, present in
the cloud, accompanied God’s people in the desert. The divine presence is
actually inscribed, but never circumscribed.97

The two cherubim extend their wings over the Ark where a seat is reserved for
the Glory of God. Yet, this throne is empty, a space of openness. Using this image,
Chauvet points precisely to the glory of God, who is inscribed but never circumscribed.
By deduction therefore, the presence of the glory of God, the shekinah of God once again
eludes our grasp and bespeaks of a God who is truly the Holy One, the Other.

In explaining God’s presence/absence, Chauvet also employs the gesture of the
breaking of the bread for distribution to the faithful. The Eucharistic bread itself unfolds

97 Ibid., 406-407.
a wide range of symbolic meaning. It is, however, the breaking of the bread by the hands of Jesus that is important here. What does this breaking of the bread signify, and how does it relate to the presence/absence of God in the Eucharist? For Chauvet, when Jesus breaks the bread and gives it to the disciples, he brings both them and us to the apex of the Eucharist itself: “the symbol par excellence of the adesse of Christ giving his life.”

This meaning and symbolism in the breaking of the bread operate on a number of levels. First, the members of the faithful celebrate communion with each other and with Christ. The bond of love between God and humanity is re-affirmed. Second, the “opening of the bread from the inside,” the fracture of the bread, results in an “open space,” a certain absence in and through which the risen Christ in the spiritual risen body is revealed to the eyes of faith. Third, this open space operates within the matrix of the symbolic order. Once again, the openness provides the ground for the “coming-into-presence” of the risen One, transcending all the categories of reason, logic, and metaphysics characteristic of this world.

Here it may be helpful to consider the Eucharistic prayer of the Eastern Church as the celebrant breaks the bread in preparation for the communion of the faithful: “Divided and distributed is the Lamb of God, who is divided yet not disunited, who is ever eaten yet never consumed, but sanctifies those who partake thereof” (Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom). During this prayer, the bishop/presbyter breaks the Eucharistic bread (the

---

98 Ibid., 407.

Lamb) into four sections and then places them on the paten in a cruciform pattern in preparation for distribution to the faithful. Perhaps the “space” which emerges on the paten among the four sections of the Lamb who is divided yet not disunited, could serve as another image of the existential space characteristic of Chauvet’s interpretation of that “space.” We are reminded that we are partaking of and participating in the “mystical body of Christ” which is not subject to the dictates of physics, metaphysics, etc. Chauvet refers to this as “a space of gratuitousness,” by which he means that a space emerges wherein the gratuitous love of God is offered to the faithful and that we, in turn, offer freely to God in Christ all that belongs to him to his glory, honor, worship and praise. We are indeed partaking of the Divine Mystery of God’s very life through the world of the symbolic.

Chauvet reminds us that the example of the breaking and distribution of the Lamb of God is but one of the many rituals, actions, and words that express the divine mystery in the celebration of the Eucharist. With Schmemann, as we shall see later in this dissertation, Chauvet cautions us not to fall into the proverbial trap of isolationism in focusing on one particular image or gesture at the expense of the whole. This caution is in keeping with Chauvet’s holistic approach to the “arch-sacramentality of faith” expressed in all his work.


The Crucified One as Wholly “Other”

Throughout Chauvet’s work, reference is made to the notion of the Other (the holy) within the structure of presence. Chauvet maintains that the “remedy” for the Other understood within an ontological framework is the recontextualization of the notion of the Other, which ultimately finds its relational existential meaning in the world of the symbolic order. It is within the mediatory nature of the sacraments of the Church as that ground of the symbolic order that the Other evokes the human condition to confront itself in relation to itself and to the Other as being that of radical difference. The notion of difference, based on the theological premise characteristic of classical theology, that the nature or essence of God is beyond all categories of thought and understanding, finds expression in the apophatic tradition of the church. Referencing Thomistic use of analogous language about God and about our relationship with God, as well as that of some of the early fathers of the Church, Chauvet acknowledges the apophatic tradition of the Church as being a constitutive element in traditional Christian spirituality. Citing Thomas Aquinas, Chauvet reflects his position that there is one reality, to which humans must acquiesce: that what God is must remain completely unknown (omnino ignotum):

In saying such things, Thomas was in no way an innovator; on the contrary, he was heir to a long onto-theological tradition which, notably among the Neoplatonists, in the treatise On the Names of God by Dionysius, and in many of
the Greek Fathers – had attempted to express the incomprehensibility of God (John Chrysostom) and thus blazed the trail for negative theology.\(^{102}\)

However, we must ask whether the apophatic tradition is truly what Chauvet is appealing to when he addresses the unknowability and the difference between the Creator and creature. Indeed, Chauvet calls into question the viability of apophaticism within the parameters of his theological construct:

The crucified God is not crossed-out Being. The kenotic erasure visited upon God by the cross represents less the “non-entity” than the *non-other*. The me-ontology indicated here is not of the same order as negative onto-(theo)logy but of the order of *symbolism*: it is in disfiguring Jesus to the point of removing from him all otherness, in reducing him to a non-face, a non-subject, and “object” of derision (cf. Isa 52:14), that humans have made of him a *me-on* (“non-being,” cf. 1 Cor 1:28), which is what Paul expresses culturally under the figure of the slave. That the non-face of the crucified One be the “para-doXical” trace of Divine Glory, that the face of God show itself only by erasing itself, that we think of God less in the metaphysical order of the Unknowable than in the symbolic and historical order of the unrecognizable – quite clearly this is the “folly” which theologians attempt to express through their discourse.\(^{103}\)

\(^{102}\) Ibid., 37-38.

\(^{103}\) Ibid., 74-75.
Chauvet maintains that apophaticism is not appropriate to the discourse at hand. While apophaticism is truly characteristic of the mystical tradition and classical theology in general, it is based on the axiom of the “Being of God” which is once again subjugated to metaphysical ontology:

Chauvet is dissatisfied with Western metaphysics, in its various forms, because it has an underlying desire to explain being in its totality. This Chauvet identifies as onto-theology, and he sees it as the biggest obstacle to the recovery of the symbolic understanding, which is by definition never fully graspable by concepts. Symbolic understanding presupposes what Heidegger calls the revelation of being, which we here are to understand precisely as a revelation and not as something with we can own as “stock in trade.” Being is not an entity—a “beingness,” rather it is a non-thing; it “never ceases to hide within a difference which constitutes it.” Chauvet repeats with Heidegger that we are thrown into Being. From Emmanuel Levinas, Chauvet takes a critique of the obsession with “identity,” and a turn of attention, where the Other is constitutive for the subject and gives it its lost identity.104

What is crucial for Chauvet is his emphasis on the crucified One, the Suffering Servant imagery, which provides Chauvet with a fundamental insight into the scandal of the cross and which remains a true stumbling block and folly even for those who

theologize about the reality of the cross. For Chauvet, who was crucified is not humanity in general but a specific person, Jesus of Nazareth, who is the revelation of God. The Other, by the mediatory nature of the symbolic/sacramental, not only intimates but also reveals the character of the specificity of all symbols and symbolic actions. There are no generalities here regarding the person of the Other: the Other is specified in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified and risen One. This crucified and risen One cannot be relegated to the category of being, which is where the apophatic paradigm is demonstrated as being weak in communicating the nature and reality of Christ:

Even in its most negative expressions, onto-theology can neither think nor express the radical crossing out of “God” which is at issue here. As we have said above (ch. 2), the me-ontology (the study of “things that are not”) required here cannot be placed in the tradition of apophatic theology. Although apophatic theology leads toward the “learned unknowing” of God, it does so in an atemporal manner, starting from a conceptual logic and once again attributing to God the totality of the perfections of pure Being. But we collide here with the historical scandal of the cross.  

In addressing the crucifixion of Jesus, Chauvet draws upon the Suffering Servant imagery of Isaiah, of Psalm 22, and of the Pauline text in Philippians that references the absolute humility and humiliation of Jesus. In these scriptural accounts, Jesus, the

---

105 Chauvet, Symbol and Sacrament, 299.
crucified One, was crucified within the unfolding of history; yet it proves insufficient for Chauvet to find rest in a construct which speaks of the humiliation and suffering of Jesus as expressed even within a negative onto-theology based on meontology. Both of these theological/philosophical notions fall short of making an impact both on an existential level and a theological level. The definitive rejection of Jesus in the scandal of the cross, coupled with Jesus’ abandonment by God, becomes the defining hour from which the ultimate revelation of his glory shows forth. The scriptural images cited above speak of Jesus as the despised one, rejected, beyond human resemblance, scorned, seen as a worm not a human, reduced to “…the absolute bottom of the ‘nothing’ of humanity.” Jesus is reduced to a level where there is no longer room for negotiating the concept of “being,” an offspring of metaphysics/ontology/meontology. To remedy what Chauvet sees as the trap of the metaphysic of Being, he proposes another epistemology; that of the symbolic epistemology of the Other. It is from within this primary construct that Chauvet offers an alternative to the constraints of traditional metaphysics. In addition, one might ask, given the radical otherness of God, in what way(s) does this otherness manifest itself within the discourse of presence so fundamental to Chauvet’s theology and methodology? In addressing these questions, a few fundamental premises of Chauvet must be considered, beginning with his notion of our “assent to a loss.”

A central theme woven throughout Chauvet’s work is his notion of our “assent to a loss” which may appear, at first glance and at best, paradoxical and at worst a

106 Ibid., 500.
107 Chauvet, The Sacraments, 39.
deprivation relative to our relationship with God. Is not the Christian message, both in biblical and sacramental imagery, replete with the notions of abundance and fulfillment? In addition, what type of faith would present to its adherents the possibility of loss even within the framework of sacrifice and altruism? Indeed, it would seem that the reverse is true in that, relative to the functionality of religions in general, the notions of promise and fulfillment on the psychological, sociological, and even economic levels of human existence lies at the root of most major religious systems. It is the hopeful promise and expectation that one will find ultimate meaning and fulfillment within a faith system regarding the purpose of one’s life and indeed how to live life to the fullest.

However, it is this assent to loss which ultimately, for Chauvet, becomes the necessary condition for us humans as we are placed by the Other within a relational ground so that a true koinonia may be celebrated as a gift of God. Without this “crossing out” of the presence of that which we deem familiar and controllable we will ultimately, Chauvet believes, be led to idolatry. Idolatry, in this case, manifests itself as a projection of our ideas and constructs imposed on the Other, ultimately reducing the Other to the level of sameness, a tenet characteristic of Hellenic philosophy as mentioned earlier in this dissertation. Along with this sameness comes a sense of control and manipulation on our part, the creation of a closed system wherein we humans live with the delusion of the possibility of an attainable God who can and ultimately will be manipulated, even controlled, by our human wants and desires. It is this openness to the radical difference of the Other together with the crossing out of the familiar which Chauvet maintains can be seen within the narrative of the mystery of the Crucified One risen from the dead.
The Community of Faith: Ecclesia as the Setting for Eucharistic Experience and Faith

In chapter 10 of *Symbol and Sacrament*, as Chauvet surveys the landscape of theological reflection regarding Eucharistic presence throughout the Middle Ages, he focuses chiefly on the term *transubstantiation*, which sometimes can be illusively misunderstood relative to the *theological truth* this term tried to convey. In short, Chauvet proposes that the efforts of the scholastics to deal with the belief in the Eucharistic presence of Christ were against the polemics of those who either denied such a presence or wandered into the world of gross over-physicality. Yet, Chauvet maintains that focusing on the mechanisms relative to transubstantiation, as well as the logic and reasoning employed, served to “crowd out,” in a certain sense, the faithful gathered for the Eucharist. The focus on the “change” of the Eucharistic elements, he believes, overshadowed the dynamic of those assembled to be greeted and met by the Risen Lord and each other.

Chauvet contends that the Eucharistic celebration must be seen in a holistic way, not merely as a collection of isolated ritualistic acts juxtaposed through random ordering. Taken together, the Eucharistic celebration is a single symbol, its constituent parts inseparable from one another. Such an approach enables one to see that each of the symbolic gestures and rites characterizing the celebration makes sense only in this way. Indeed, this holistic approach most adequately forms the very ground for the manifestation of the Risen Lord in and through the media of sacraments. It is Christ’s initiative to manifest his presence within his Body, the church:

Thus understood, the Eucharistic presence appears as the *crystallization* of Christ’s presence in the *assembly* (ecclesia) gathered in his name and presided
over by himself in the *Scriptures* proclaimed as his living word. The Christ who comes-to-presence in the bread and wine does not suddenly fall “from heaven” (if we are permitted this expression); he comes from the *assembly*—and this is why the grace of the Eucharist is Christ, head and body.\(^{108}\)

The point here is that it is within the celebrating community that the “coming-into-presence” of the Risen Lord occurs.

It would be difficult to overstate the ecclesial dimension, indeed the ecclesial imperative, that is so prominent in Chauvet’s sacramental vision. For Chauvet, it is the community of faith, the church, that provides the locus for the mediation of God’s love and salvation as experienced and celebrated in the sacramental life of the church. It is the symbolic order which mediates the faith and life rooted in Jesus Christ. Indeed, the language of the church as the “arch-sacramentality of the faith” is offered to the faithful who have been embraced by the Word and are invited to participate in the saving power of the Word both in theoria and praxis.\(^{109}\) Chauvet contends that we humans are recipients of the gift of the community of faith offered by Christ for our conversion to him; a conversion which takes place on a personal basis, but not on a radically individualized basis—that is, the individual viewed in the radical sense of ego-centric, narcissistic exclusivity. It is in the dynamic of relationality, as celebrated in the symbolic

---


\(^{109}\) Chauvet deals extensively with the Scriptural (Word) dimension of the faith and the sacramental life with an equally emphasized dimension of the ethical (praxis) dimension of faith. It is well beyond the purpose of this dissertation to address these aspects of Chauvet’s work; nevertheless, they do convey a crucial dimension of Chauvet’s theology for one who desires to explore these dimensions of his theology.
order that we humans find our true selves as a community of faith in and with God and each other. In other terms, we find our true personhood in the *ecclesia*.

As referenced above, Chauvet speaks of the “arch-sacramentality of faith” which is expressed on the corporal level. Corporality is key to Chauvet’s theology:

Now, what does Chauvet say about the corporality or the “arch-sacramentality of the faith”? It is symbolic, participatory; it enables the subject to recognize its identity within the wider whole, within the community, the church. Chauvet speaks of the “triple body which makes us into believers”, first, the *social* body, the church with its network and interpretation of history, life and the universe; second, the *traditional* body, which within the church supports the whole of ritual, through references to the words and deeds of Christ attested by the apostolic witness of the Scriptures; third, the *cosmic* body of a universe received as a gift of the Creator, from which symbolic elements, water, bread and wine, oil… are recognized as a “sacramental mediation of God,” acting in the Spirit.\(^{110}\)

We should remember that when Chauvet speaks of the “triple body which makes us into believers,” he is approaching these three elements not in isolation but in a participatory and inner-connected way. Each of these three elements or characteristics, in and of themselves, may prove deficient, thus emphasizing once again Chauvet’s holistic hermeneutic.

\(^{110}\) Noble, “From Sacramentality,” 12.
In treating the concepts of personal relationship and Christian identity within the ecclesial setting, we must consider Chauvet’s treatment of the human as “subject” and, upon further analysis, his treatment of the person as a believing subject. For Chauvet, our identity as believing subjects is ultimately determined by our assent to faith in Jesus Christ, which is made possible by our initiation and participation in the body of believers, the community of faith. By way of offering a model for ascertaining our Christian identity, Chauvet points to the story of the road to Emmaus which, he believes, demonstrates our subjectivity which requires personal commitment and our conversion from faith to non-faith. The transformative Emmaus narrative (Luke 24) recalls the story of a journey, the journey of disciples leaving the city of Jerusalem to return to Emmaus, yet finding themselves returning to Jerusalem, transformed by their encounter with the Risen Christ.

Chauvet begins by recalling the account of the women who went to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus following his crucifixion, death, and entombment, posing a question about what they expected to find. They desire to anoint the body of their beloved Jesus in faithfulness to their tradition and to show their love for the one who imaged forth love for God and his fellow humans. Nevertheless, the story appears to have ended for them with the death of their master. As if his death were not enough, their dismay is magnified when their desire to see and to touch the body of Jesus is met with a reality which brings them to a point of bewilderment, loss, and disbelief. His body is not to be found. The news of the resurrection of Jesus by way of the angelic proclamation; the appearances of the Risen One to the Eleven, which result in their being terrified and in a state of disbelief; the account of Peter reaching the tomb and finding only the linen
clothes; Cleopas and his companion, whose eyes are closed—all of these instances, Chauvet maintains, indicate the state of non-belief in which the disciples find themselves. It is a state of non-belief characterized by the compelling desire to “see-touch-find” the Jesus so familiar to them:

The passage of faith thus requires that one let go of the desire to see-touch-find, to accept in its place the hearing of a word, whether it comes from angels or from the Risen One himself, a word recognized as the word of God. For the desire to see, analogous here to the desire to know, and the desire to find, analogous here to the desire to prove—can only lead us to fail to recognize the risen Lord because they direct us back toward his dead body. The story of Emmaus makes this lesson explicit. It is all the more striking in that the passage is arranged in exactly the same way as two other Lucan stories: the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26–40) and the first account of the conversion of Saul (Acts 9:1–20).111

It is precisely this desire to quantify and hold onto the Risen One, to place him within the order of this world which objectifies the Lord, makes him an object of our desires and wants. The existential space, the “assent to loss” spoken of earlier as crucial to the free grace of God as gift and our free response to his offer, suffers from an obstruction of our own desires to hold onto that which we deem necessary and sufficient. It was the announcement of the angel(s) to the women at the tomb (Luke 10: 1-12) which set their lives and their world into new terrain—a terrain marked by the necessary assent

111 Chauvet, Symbol and Sacrament, 162
to a loss of that which is most familiar. In this new terrain we are confronted with the possibility of conversion, conversion to a reality that can be most fully conveyed and experienced only within the sacramental life of the church, which becomes the order of our access to faith. The Risen Lord is characterized by the Absent One, the one who ascends to the heavens, the one who bequeaths the church with his Word, the Holy Scriptures, his coming-into-presence with the proclamation of the Word, the celebrative rites and gestures of the Eucharistic celebration culminating in the union with the believers in the breaking of the bread.

In addressing the journey of non-faith to faith, Chauvet places before us select images from the Emmaus story as metaphors for the faith journey. The two disciples leave the city of Jerusalem following the death of Jesus. Their countenances are sad; they turn their backs on Jerusalem—in essence, turning their backs on their encounter with Jesus, who is now dead. Chauvet characterizes the conversation between the two men as a “post-mortem,” full of defeat and dejection. They are focused on the dead body of Jesus, sealed in a tomb by a heavy stone; their entire being is closed and in disbelief for what has taken place; “their eyes were shut.” The dialogue between the two is “closed,” a conversation between two people who can perhaps only wallow in each other’s sadness and sense of defeat and utter loss. All of the aspirations of their Lord and his mission appear fruitless, even scandalous. The Son of God hangs on the tree accursed; why did God not deliver him? The mission has failed.

It is only at the crucial point in the narrative—with the entering of the “Other,” a third conversant—that a foundational shift takes place in the lives of the two disciples. This other person, a stranger, enters not only their conversation but also their very lives:
the dyad is transformed to a triad. It is the entering of the third, the stranger, that sets the stage for conversion, a transformation from despair to hope, from death to life in the truest sense of the word.

He enters into a conversation with them, and lets them name their situation; lets them tell their story. He first appeals to their memory, then makes a link with the Scriptures: “remember...slow of heart, all that the prophets have declared...everything...must be fulfilled,” and offers a rereading of all the Scriptures. Chauvet says, “Instead of holding onto the self-assured pronouncements on God, one must begin by listening to a word as the word of God.”

112

It is precisely when Jesus begins to offer the Word of the Holy Scriptures and begins to interpret them for the disciples that they begin to see; they begin to recognize the One who is among them, and their steps toward faith begin through the initiative of the Risen Lord. The Lord’s opening to them of himself through the scriptures causes their hearts to burn within them. The Word is proclaimed; this, for Chauvet, is nothing other than the sacramental/liturgical proclamation of the Word within the Eucharistic gathering.

We next consider the breaking of the bread with the Emmaus disciples. This imagery evokes the Eucharistic breaking of the bread, the koinonia between the Risen Lord and the faithful. As the bread is broken and offered, this gesture, which Chauvet

notes takes place not outside on the road, but around the table, is revelatory of the bread that becomes the flesh of the Risen Lord to be shared by the disciples:

At this point, their eyes are opened; what they see allows them to understand what is truly at issue, specifically, the Eucharist of the Church ... Their eyes open on an emptiness—“he vanished out of their sight”—but an emptiness full of a presence. They open on the emptiness of the invisibility of the Lord each time the Church breaks bread in memory of him; but this emptiness is penetrated by his symbolic presence because the disciples have just realized that whenever the Church takes bread, pronounces the blessing, breaks and distributes it—it is he, the Church’s Lord, who continues to take the bread of his life given for others; to direct to God the thanksgiving prayer; to break the bread, as his own body was broken, to achieve unity for us all; and to give this saying, “This is my body.” In the time of the Church in which our story takes place, Jesus the Christ is absent as “the same”; he is no longer present except as “the Other.” From now on, it is impossible to touch his real body; we can touch it only as the body symbolized through the testimony of the Church gives about him..."^{113}

This model as presented by Chauvet articulates well the ecclesial/relational dimension of the assent to faith from non-belief to belief through an encounter with the risen Christ. The ecclesial setting as the topos of our encounter with the risen Lord is foundational to the mystery of faith. The Emmaus story continues as the disciples return

^{113} Chauvet, Symbol and Sacrament, 170.
to Jerusalem, having encountered the joy of the Lord. Their mission of defeat turns into a mission of joy and return, into acceptance instead of rejection. The topographical imagery of Jerusalem-Emmaus-Jerusalem represents the transformative nature of these disciples’ encounter with the Risen Lord. They came “full circle” through the initiative of the Other, the stranger, the Third who entered their conversation and their world. “And he vanished out of their sight”; with this witness to the one who is present in absence, the stage is set for the next section of this chapter concerning Chauvet’s treatment of the “symbol” and the “symbolic order.”

Regaining the Meaning of the Symbol and the Symbolic Order

Chauvet recognizes the devolution of the term *symbol* and the notion of the symbolic throughout the ages up to and including our contemporary times. Theologians are faced with a dilemma because of the corrupted linguistic and iconic meaning of *symbol*. The term *symbol*, as used today, usually conveys something having no relationship to the real. A great disparity exits between the “symbolic” and the “real,” whether it be situated in theological discourse or daily conversation. As Chauvet observes, the church has paid and continues to pay a great price for this misunderstanding.

---

114 Chauvet’s treatment of the symbol and the symbolic order is quite extensive. Chauvet navigates with great acumen through the often times difficult and nebulous terrain of the world of the symbolic. In his treatment of the symbol, Chauvet uses a variety of disciplines, which is characteristic of his methodology, in order to reveal the many nuances and meanings, and misunderstandings, associated with the symbol and the symbolic. In doing so, Chauvet dialogues with the discipline of linguistics and the many sub-disciplines contained within that discipline; he also distinguishes the differences between sign and symbol, and develops several theses relative to the relationship between the symbol and the body, the efficacy of ritual, and many other areas of inquiry and study. For the purposes of this dissertation, a few key concepts have been isolated and selected from Chauvet’s work which finds their relevance in the greater dialogue of Eucharistic presence which is the main theme of this dissertation. For a much more detailed account of Chauvet’s treatment of the symbol and the symbolic, one is referred to his *magnum opus*, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence.*
and hence for the devaluing of the symbol because of the imagery and efficacy that the symbol has traditionally carried within the liturgical experience and celebration of the church.

The symbolic element represents the whole of the world to which it belongs; better, it carries it in itself. This is why it is what it represents. Obviously, it is not “really” but “symbolically” what it represents precisely because the function of the symbol is to represent the real, therefore to place it at a distance in order to present it, to make it present under a new mode. …From this point of view the symbol is no longer in the field of the unreal; on the contrary, it is in the field of the most significant and the most real. Only, the real we are speaking of here is not that of raw material; it is the real humanly (symbolically) constructed into a “world,” of which we have spoken previously.¹¹⁵

A resurgence of sorts has emerged in sacramental theology relative to the somewhat elusive and often times misunderstood meanings attached to the term symbol, which has undergone a variety of theological definitions and re-definitions. The difficulty of attempting to define symbolic and the symbolic order is perhaps ultimately the problem, but we can attempt to isolate some key characteristics to explain the meaning of symbol. The symbol bespeaks mystery; it cannot be relegated to the world of empirical knowledge or of science or rational discourse. The symbol—or, in some circles, the “metaphor”—plays a crucial role in humanity’s expression of itself as the subject of a

¹¹⁵ Chauvet, The Sacraments, 72-73.
God who creates the human and the cosmos out of love. As Chauvet frames it; “Symbols ‘speak’ to us before we even begin to talk.” \(^{116}\) Chauvet attempts to situate the symbol within new epistemological terrain, hoping to extract the symbol and the symbolic from the confines of metaphysics and to make a necessary and fundamental shift from metaphysical methodology to the world of the symbolic.

For Chauvet, symbols and sacraments are situated within the framework of a certain language. Here, and in Chauvet’s thought, *language* means more than a linguistic structure per se, although linguistic structure is operative here. Language includes the whole matrix of words, gestures, rites, signs, symbols, etc. which, according to Chauvet, within the dynamic of mediation:… “is no longer regarded as an instrument but as a womb…” \(^{117}\) It is a language from within, a language into which we humans are immersed; the language of the Church, its sacraments, which are primarily symbolic in nature:

What is valid for human subjects in general is of course valid for Christian subjects. To attain their identity as Christians, they must be part of the symbolic order proper to the church. The symbolic womb within which each person is born as Christian through initiation, is unique. Of course the symbolic order is rooted in the general culture, but it reconfigures it, that is to say, it brings to the culture new directions, so new that Christians understand the meaning of their own lives differently from atheists or Muslims. One becomes a Christian only by adopting

\(^{116}\) Ibid., 70.

\(^{117}\) Ibid, 9.
the “mother tongue” of the church. Sacraments are an important element of this tongue. However, they are only one element among others.\(^{118}\)

And for Chauvet, it is the language of the symbolic which provides the medium for humans to connect with what surrounds them: God, the world, our body, all of creation.

To reflect upon the human engagement of reality...is to reject the Western dualistic valuing of soul over body, mind over matter, invisible over visible, unchanging essence over becoming-in existence. Instead, with Chauvet, one comes to recognize that the “sensible mediations of language, body, history, desire” comprise “the very milieu within which human beings attain their truth and thus correspond to the Truth which calls them.” This lack of immediate access to reality is what constitutes the human need for language, by which is meant the entire range of symbols whereby humans submit to the otherness intrinsic to life. To the rule-bound, cultural layers through which they perceive the raw data of the physical universe affect their senses. Constantly working with the signs, words, gesture, and narrative—the “language”—of their society, people participate in a world at once given—through symbolism and language usually so conventional to the native user as to be seem “natural” yet continuously under construction.\(^{119}\)

\(^{118}\) Ibid, 17.

Chauvet also takes into account the pre-linguistic dimension of the symbol:

The prelinguistic dimension of the symbol, more ontic than linguistic, is always presupposed to be at a point of becoming language in the broad sense: “For there is no human reality, however interior or intimate, except through the mediation of language or quasi-language that gives it a body by expressing it. …it (the symbol) only resides there as a “witness to a vacant place,” the symbol holding the real means of its flesh. Like an ambassador who re-presents his country in speaking and acting in its name, the symbol makes present what it refers to and, through what is physical, its corporal opaqueness (action, gesture, object), it conveys toward that what is symbolized. For this reason, by this positive realization of the extralinguistic, there is no more vacant place, no more absence, so that the presence “under the manner of absence” of the Risen One becomes sacramental presence, that is, *symbolic-real*.120

Building on this idea, Chauvet maintains that symbols are “less objects of speech” than the “space” within which speech takes and finds it meaning. We humans, in other words, do not create symbols and somehow bring the symbolic into our conversation and space; rather, we discover the symbolic as those mediatory images and gestures that belong to what Chauvet calls the “arch-sacramentality of faith.”121 It is

---

120 Ibid., 162.

through the symbol that we are situated in relation to the “the most real aspects of ourselves and our world. It touches us to the quick.”

Chauvet maintains that we cannot escape the order of the symbolic. He considers it “folly” if we believe that we can interact with the world around us, at least in a meaningful way, or in some “raw” manner without the mediatory attribute of the symbol which places us within a larger context of our existence. Indeed, Chauvet maintains that symbols speak to us even before we are able to speak. We are born into the world of the symbolic. It is through symbolic and sacramental mediation that we are situated in the world, a world created by God that serves ultimately as a means of communion with him through the incarnate Christ and the body of his church. The incarnate Logos of God, fully human and fully God, is central to Chauvet’s theology as is the mystery of faith in the Paschal event of the risen Christ.

Critically important to Chauvet’s theological construct of symbol and sacrament is the ecclesial body as the ground within which the symbol and the sacraments serve as mediators of God’s salvific work. For Chauvet, faith is manifested within the corporal. It is within and through the body of the risen Christ and the body of Christ as ecclesia that God’s love is mediated. It is within the body of the Church—including its liturgical celebrations of the sacraments, the proclamation of the Living Word through the Holy Scriptures, and indeed the entire “world of the language” of the liturgy—that we receive the saving grace of God as gift. According to Chauvet, there is no room for radical

---

122 Ibid., 123.

123 This point is most clearly and emphatically portrayed in his text The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body.
individualism in Christianity. The catholicity of the church is at the forefront here, catholicity meaning not only universality and inclusivity but also wholeness and integrity as a gift of God and as an invitation to all humans to find their true personhood in the ecclesial gathering.

Chauvet presents four traits of the symbol; (1) fitting together, (2) crystallization, (3) recognition (or identification), and (4) submission to the communal Other. In the first trait, “fitting together,” Chauvet reflects on the meaning of the term symbol as “putting together” (sym-ballein). In ages past, the symbol has appeared under the mode of a contractual agreement. An object would be divided in two, and each party to the contract would possess a piece of the object. These two objects were held in surety as a pledge that one day they would be reassembled to make the whole again. Chauvet notes that as long as each of these two pieces remain isolated from the whole, they lose the ability to function on the symbolic level and are reduced to the realm of the “imagination.” Each isolated piece, extrapolated and divorced from the whole, could be viewed only outside the context of its ultimate meaning.

Once the pieces are joined together, they form once again a greater whole under the primary imagery of relationality. Each piece or section finds its meaning only in relation to and in reference to the other. Additionally, for Chauvet, the symbol transcends any material value; it jettisons one into the realm not of value but of relationship. Here we should note how this divorce from the whole, this disintegration of sorts, and the material value mindset have found their way into the whole sacramental

\[124\] Chauvet, The Sacraments, 70.
system of the church, illustrating the many fundamental challenges to sacramental/Eucharistic theology and liturgical practice today.

By isolating one element of the Christian liturgy, by cutting it not only from the faith of the church but even more simply from the whole of the celebration to which it belongs, one risks attributing to it totally imaginary significance. Thus, “the consecration,” too often cut off from the whole of the Eucharistic Prayer, as well as from the Liturgy of the Word, even from the church assembly, risks being seen as the more or less “magical” moment when in some way Jesus suddenly “falls” from heaven onto the altar. Similarly, when the priest is understood in isolation, that is, when he is cut off from the community for whose service he was sent for the mission of evangelization, which is his “foremost task,” his person is imaginarily exalted to the point of being placed almost above the angels.

A specific example of this divorce from the whole concerns the question as to when the “moment” of consecration takes place—that is, at what precise “moment” the bread and wine becomes the body and blood of Christ and what verbal or gestural formulae bring about this change—which has engaged theologians for decades. If in the Roman tradition, it is when the priest offers the words of our Lord “…take eat…drink of this…” then the “moment” has arrived. The Orthodox, because of certain theological circumstances, felt compelled to answer the very same question and simply transferred the moment of consecration from the words of institution to the words said by the priest.

125 Ibid., 86.
at the epiclesis invoking the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the faithful and the gifts. Then the consecration takes place; then the “moment” has arrived. In all reality, the Orthodox simply changed the “formula” from the words of institution to the epiclesis. In essence, both traditions fell victim to the isolating tendency of reductionism. Both traditions failed to see all gestures, words, rites, etc., finding their ultimate efficacy and meaning in view in relation to the whole of the Eucharist celebration.

By the second trait, crystallization, Chauvet means that the symbol bears in itself the very reality that it represents.126 Hereby the symbol is contrasted to the sign, which relates a subject to an object on the level of knowledge and is therefore limited to the task of pointing to something other than itself. The symbol, on the other hand, is epiphanic/theophanic, revelatory (as imminent and transcendent, revealing yet hiding), and participatory in nature. The symbol is the medium through which we are able to participate in the reality that the symbol is rendering present. Consider the following characteristic of symbol as presented by George Worgul:

Unlike a conventional sign, a symbol is not grounded in an arbitrary human agreement. Symbols are not made by humankind. They are discovered in reality. Unlike an image, a symbol does not aim at exact reduplication or identity. A symbol points to a reality different than itself and makes it present without being identical to it.

126 Note here that while it can be postulated that the symbol bears in itself that which it symbolizes, the symbol in no way exhausts the reality that it symbolizes nor is it identical to that which it symbolizes.
Symbols could be labeled ‘supercharged’ realities. By packing so much into itself, a symbol opens up a level of reality, of being and corresponding meaning, which otherwise we could not reach, and it is in doing so that the symbol participates in that which it opens to a new awareness. Symbols are primarily agents of unity and divergence.\textsuperscript{127}

Worgul emphasizes that the symbol is not a construct of the human; rather we humans discover the symbolic in the givenness of our existence. The symbol manifests the presence of a reality beyond our reach without being identical to that reality or exhausting that reality. The symbol is also participatory in character: the symbol participates in the reality that it renders present through a new awareness on our part as recipients of experiential knowledge of the Other.

In distinguishing sign from symbol, Chauvet notes the following:

It can be sensed that the symbol is not the same as a sign. Let us enumerate some of their principle differences. The sign, Ortigues writes, “leads to something other than itself” because it implies “a difference between two orders of relations: the sensible signifying relations and the intelligible signified relations.” On the contrary, the symbol “does not lead to something of another order than itself, as does the sign, but it has the function of introduction into an order of which itself is a part.”\textsuperscript{128}

\textsuperscript{127} George S. Worgul, \textit{From Magic to Metaphor}, 41.
\textsuperscript{128} Chauvet, \textit{The Sacraments}, 72.
Chauvet notes that the symbol’s function is introductory; it introduces us to an order of which the symbol itself is a part. For example, the bread and wine as *bread and wine* offered at the Eucharist, “takes us up” to another order,¹²⁹ the Kingdom of God, in which the bread and wine as symbol is a “part” of that order. The bread is bread, the wine is wine. Yet both as gift are, through the order of the symbolic, revealed and manifested with the entire matrix of the symbolic order, as truly bread and wine still, but as life in, through, and with the Risen Christ. It is his Body and Blood of which we partake in a manner most mysterious, yet most familiar. The bread and wine in this new context, is revealed to us as the Body and Blood of Christ; the Anaphora prayer of St. Basil renders it thus: “…and *reveal* this bread to be the most precious body of our Lord Jesus Christ… and this wine to be itself the most precious blood.” Note Basil’s use of *reveal*; let us now see with the eyes of faith through the media of the anti-types of the Body and Blood of Christ, the Eucharistic presence of the Risen Christ and let us partake of him in his offering of himself.

In further commenting on the Eucharistic gifts of bread and wine, Chauvet explores the metaphorical meanings behind these gifts from the earth, lamenting to a degree that the scholastics, in their quest to elucidate the how of transubstantiation, came to neglect the semantic richness of the Biblical context of these gifts. Bread, which simultaneously images the labor of our hands, the fruits of the earth as a gift from God, and, within the Eucharist, “God as Gift,” is the very sustenance of the human race and is

thus placed within the symbolic order to image forth the Bread and Manna from above, Christ himself. In referencing the anamnetic (the remembrance of the manna from heaven supplied by God to the ancient Hebrews) as well as the eschatological character of the Eucharistic celebration as the banquet of the Kingdom, one is drawn into the imagery of “bread-manna-word,” and the “bread of life.” Bread as bread, wine as wine, (the image of messianic joy) find their true identity as the medium for the presence of the risen Lord, not in some objective metaphysical manner, but as Christ himself as Gift:

It happens that it (bread) is presented to God as the highest word of recognition by humankind: recognition of God as God, that is, as the one who makes a gift of bread, and finally of existence itself since bread then functions as an element symbolically representing all creation; and simultaneously gratitude toward God. Bread is never so much bread as in the gesture of thankful oblation where it gathers within itself heaven and earth, believers who “hold fellowship” in sharing it, and the giver whom they acknowledge to be God: in this way a new communion of life is established with “real” bread and then only afterwards and under certain circumstances a symbol of this gathering. *All bread is essentially this symbol, even if it is only in the symbolic act of religious oblation that its essence as bread unfolds itself. ...the Church recognizes it as the gift of God’s very self, as the autocommunication of God’s very self in Christ: “The Body of Christ – Amen!”*¹³⁰

¹³⁰ Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 397.
Chauvet maintains that if we think otherwise, we are missing a key component in the mystery of faith. As God shares his very life through the Eucharist, so too are we humans invited to share in koinonia, the Heavenly Bread, in gratitude and joy.

Because the symbol serves as a revelatory and participative medium for the human subject, it crystallizes the whole world to which it belongs. It embodies the larger mystery in such a manner that we humans can participate in the mystery which is of the order of the “other.” The symbol carries within itself what it represents; elevating it to that which it represents on a new plane. “…the function of the symbol is to represent the real, therefore to place it at a distance in order to present it, to make it present under a new mode.” 131

What is this new mode? It is the modality of communicating that beyond description, categorization, circumscription: i.e., the Mystery of the Other.

The third trait of the symbol is recognition. In the imagery of two parties who are each in possession of one piece of the whole, when the two parties reunite the two pieces, the dynamic of recognition is initiated. Each party is “subject” and therefore recognizable in relation to and by the other. The subjects now are situated within the medium of relationship. On the larger scale of the world of the symbol or symbolic, one of the functions of the symbol is to provide the space for the “subject as subject” and the “subject for subject” to be nurtured and realized. Rejecting any instrumental or objective value relative to the human, the world of the symbol serves as the locus for recognition and discovery of the intra-subjective as well as the inter-subjective to meet within a common point of reference and discovery, which is the world of the symbolic. It is within

131 Chauvet, The Sacraments, 72.
the symbolic construct, with its myriad of images, rites and gestures, that participants are enabled as subjects to be immersed within the evocative nature of the symbolic language in which each participant finds his linguistic home. The invitation of the “I-Thou” is operative here, and in this trait of recognition characteristic of the symbol, “…the symbol assigns a place to the subject.”132 The subject is situated within the human condition as it is, and as it will be transfigured through life in the Church.

Finally, the agency of the Other provides the subjects with the ground of community. The operative function of the Other serves as principal agent which provides the order, i.e. the symbolic order, as the network within which the human subject interacts with the other within the communal order. “The symbol is a mediator of identity only by being a creator of community…”133 As social beings and, more specifically, communal beings within the parameters of the faith community of believers, subjects are immersed in a symbolic environment that mediates and evokes within them the sense of the reality of community, which does not result from the efforts of the human for its existence and symbolic structure but is rather a community offered as gift, the ecclesial body of Christ. It is through the initiative of God, in his son Jesus Christ offered to humanity, that the community finds its genesis and telos.

Another aspect of the symbol remains which is critically important to Chauvet: that the symbol lies outside the category of economic value. What does Chauvet mean

132 Ibid., 74.
133 Ibid., 74.
when he says, “The symbol is by its nature outside the realm of value.”134 For Chauvet, the sacraments are essentially about the mediation of God’s grace. In order to emphasize the notion that grace lies beyond the categories of “thing” and “value,” which will have implications well beyond simply the notion of grace, Chauvet borrows imagery from the Exodus narrative recalling the gratuitous action of God who, out of his love, sent manna to the ancient Israelites as they made their journey through the wilderness. Consider the following:

Like manna in the desert, which is perhaps its most beautiful biblical expression, grace is of an entirely different order from that of value or empirical verifiability. Its very name is a question. Man hu? Its name is “What is this?” Its consistency seems to be that of a “something” as fine as frost on the ground which melts in the sun. Further, the measuring of it resembles a “non-measure”: they gather it up—“some …more, some less”; but when they proceed to estimate its quantity, they observe, contrary to all logic of value, that “those who gathered much had nothing left over, and those who gathered little had no shortage;” finally, for those who, violating the Lord’s command, wanted to store some for the future “it bred worms and became foul” (Exod. 16: 19-21). Grace as a question, grace as a non-thing, grace as a non-value: How can we make sense of this pure sign which begins with a question, other than by choosing the path of symbol, the path

134 Chauvet, Symbol and Sacrament, 129.
of non-calculation and non-utility? This is, in any case, our primordial question.135

The manna, like the Body of Christ in the Eucharist, is a gift from God. This gift not only defies any categorization based on empirical evidence or rationality but also it is beyond the grasp and manipulation of the human. It is a gift “from above”; its genesis is in God. This gift is beyond all human abilities and constructs and cannot be reduced to the category of value.

This value imagery, which is constitutive and expressive of contemporary Western cultures and economic systems and which emphasizes utility and worth, is superseded by the mysterious manna sent from the heavens, which ultimately lies outside the constructs of value or worth. Grace cannot be weighted according to value. Such a constraint will result in something other than grace as gift, the gift of God’s life to the human. It will result in the morphing of grace into something foreign to God and the human.

Chauvet’s response to his own primordial question is to emphasize the imperative in transferring the notion of grace from the logic of any metaphysical, onto-theological construct to that of the linguistic body of symbol. Chauvet once again invokes the difference between the sign and symbol (keeping in mind that both sign and symbol are necessary components of symbolism, albeit each functioning on a different level); “…the sign pertains to “value” (material value, knowledge value, moral value, and so on,

135 Ibid., 44-45.
whereas the symbol stands outside the value system.”136 From this point forward in his work, Chauvet prefers to speak in perhaps more precise terms, employing the terms market exchange and symbolic exchange instead of the terms sign and symbol respectively. Perhaps this shift in terminology is helpful in that it more precisely expresses Chauvet’s position.

In presenting the symbol as related to value, Chauvet offers observations using examples from an anthropological vantage point. He notes that in traditional/primitive societies, the order of the exchange of gifts, is represented and experienced according to a certain logic that is quite foreign to contemporary Western categories of thought and experience. Chauvet cites the work of Georges Duby, who writes of the logic of an economic exchange system found among certain indigenous, primitive societies that does not correspond to our normative logic of exchange:

…it is a logic that obeys another principle than the one which rules today’s Western societies. It is precisely a symbolic logic in which what is important is less “having” than “being”; a logic according to which …a treasure is not “capital” but an “ornament,” a cause of pride for the whole people; a logic according to which the poorest person can take to the grave her or his most precious objects; a logic according to which every person must hold her or his place with honor, albeit the lowliest place.

________________________

136 Chauvet, The Sacraments, 117.
Symbolic exchange obeys a logic of another order: in it the “subjects exchange themselves,” in contrast to market exchange where values are what is exchanged, the important thing is less what one gives or receives than the very fact of exchanging and thus, through the objects exchanged to be recognized as subject, as a full member of the group. This is the same type of symbolic logic, outside the realm of value, as within our Western gift-giving.\textsuperscript{137}

According to this certain logic, guided by an alternative principle in contrast to the norm, several salient points are worth noting. First of all, this symbolic logic is characterized not by criteria based on the possession of certain things, but by the expression of “being” of those persons involved in the exchange of the gift. That is, the act of exchange becomes the essential form of expression through which the human subjects find their subjective place within the community. Secondly, the act of exchange within the symbolic order supersedes any radical individualism and “speaks” to all subjects involved through signs of symbolic imagery and gesture, in behalf of all and for all. This level of exchange encompasses and embraces the entire community and makes possible their recognition as participating subjects within the larger context of community. In the Eucharistic celebration, for example, through the symbolic order characteristic of such an assembly, Christ’s offering to his Father and our participation in that offering in and through him, becomes the very milieu in which all members of the gathering are

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., 118-119.
recognized as loved by the Father as his children, not only superseding all levels and
categories of economic value, but supplanting them.

In this chapter on the work of Chauvet, select topics relative to the larger
discussion on Eucharistic presence have been explored. We have seen that Chauvet
engages modern philosophers and their concepts, at the same time advocating a renewal
of the understanding held by the Church Fathers of the symbol as that which partakes in
the reality. In his approach, Chauvet becomes a critical voice in the dialogue of
Eucharistic presence because prominent elements of his thoughts may be found in the
work of his dialogue partners, Alexander Schmemann and John Zizioulas. Chauvet’s
appeal to regain, once again, a consciousness of the reality of symbol interlocks with the
themes of a holistic approach to the liturgy and the sacramentality of all creation from
Schmemann, to whose work we turn in chapter 3.
CHAPTER THREE: THE SACRAMENTAL WORLDVIEW OF ALEXANDER SCHMEMANN

Alexander Schmemann, through his extensive work in liturgical theology, is credited by theologians of various Christian communions with being able to recognize, in much the same way as Chauvet, the “Western captivity” of theology. This captivity is seen as the church’s sacramental life being subjected to and suffering from the constraints of western metaphysics. In his monumental work, The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom, Schmemann presents a fresh approach to the Eucharist as he attempts to liberate certain understandings of the Eucharistic liturgy from the confines of centuries of consideration within rationalistic and humanistic philosophical constructs. Schmemann calls for a return to the notion of lex orandi est lex credendi as the normative principle of theology, and this idea is central to his theological methodology.

In this chapter, we will first look at points of contact between Schmemann and Chauvet, and then we will examine certain aspects of Schmemann’s work that depart from that of Chauvet. Schmemann’s perceptions of the liturgical crisis will then be presented; and, in conclusion, we will look at Schmemann’s sacramental worldview, concluding by examining the Eucharistic presence from this perspective.

Schmemann believed that prayer, faith, and belief are experiential in nature and, like Chauvet, that the presence of the risen Christ is sacramentality celebrated in the Eucharistic assembly. All theology, including Eucharistic theology, finds its truest roots and expression within the experiential fullness of the ecclesial body as exercised through the prayers, rites, and rituals of the symbolic order. At the root of both Schmemann’s and Chauvet’s theological visions is the Paschal mystery of Christ. It is in and through the
Pascha of the Lord that the Church finds itself in the presence of the Risen Christ. It is within the Paschal celebration, the Eucharistic and the sacramental life of the church, that believers are gifted participation in the life of God through Christ.

Schmemann also, like Chauvet, contends that there is a certain crisis in the notion of Eucharistic presence. A reductionist view of liturgical celebration has been imposed upon the church, the product of methodologies in response to questions regarding the “real presence.” Both men see the problem as arising out of the scholastic theology rooted in the West and eventually imitated in the East, which becomes an exercise in polemics divorced from the experiential nature of the liturgy itself. Thus, the elements and actions are subject to analysis according to a purely rationalistic/causal scheme. For both theologians, the experiential nature of the presence of Christ in the Eucharistic celebration is instead based on a holistic vision that is rooted in the order of the symbolic and sacramental.

Schmemann’s challenge to contemporary Eucharistic theology is to avoid the dilemmas inherent within what has become traditional Eucharistic theology. An example of this dilemma, as pointed out in chapter 2, is the attempt on the part of the Roman Catholic Church—and, in subsequent centuries, the Orthodox Church—to isolate the “when” and “how” of the consecration of the Eucharistic elements. The consecratory formulae understood as “the words of institution” in Roman Catholicism, or its eventual counterpart in the Orthodox Church that presented the epiclesis as being the “moment” of consecration, are all issues seen by Schmemann as wrongly categorized. An attempt to provide “answers” to this mystery remains beyond the narrow categorization of rationality and metaphysics. According to Schmemann:
The point of all that has been said—and I shall emphasize this over and over—is not that having become convinced of the uselessness or the impossibility of theological comprehension, we should simply dismiss these questions and as a result explain the Eucharist with that hackneyed but fundamentally blasphemous formula: “it is impossible to understand; it is only necessary to believe.” I believe and I confess that for the church, for the world, for mankind there is no more important, more urgent question than what is accomplished in the Eucharist. In reality, this question is most natural to faith, which lives by the thirst for entry into the wisdom of truth by the thirst for the logical (logiki), i.e. reasonable, service of God that manifests and is rooted in the Divine Wisdom. It is truly the question of the ultimate meaning and purpose of all that is real, of the sacramental ascent to where God will be all in all, and thus it is the question that, through faith, was constantly radiating as a mysterious burning in the hearts of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. But that it is exactly why it is so important to liberate this urgent question, to cleanse it from everything that obscures, diminishes and distorts it, and this means, first of all, those questions and answers whose depravity lies in the fact that instead of explaining the earthly through the heavenly, they reduce the heavenly and the otherworldly to the earthly, to their own “human, only human,” impoverished and feeble categories.\(^{138}\)

In his Eucharistic theology, Schmemann defies any attempt to reduce Christ’s presence to any one single definitive modality, including the modality of Eucharistic gifts themselves. This is not to imply that the Eucharistic gifts of the Body and Blood of the risen Christ are not truly received as such by the faithful, but rather that the reality of their “truth” is situated in the broader matrix of the symbolic/sacramental order. This idea, as will be demonstrated in this chapter, is crucial to Schmemann’s Eucharistic theology. As mentioned in Chapter Two, in the Eastern liturgy of both St. John Chrysostom and of St. Basil the Great, the language employed is that of revelation and disclosure: “show this bread to be itself the precious Body of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ; and this cup to be itself the precious Blood of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ, which was shed for the life of the world and its salvation.”

Hence, rather than a consecratory formulae per se, based on the paradigm of cause and effect, these words speak of the transformative power of the Holy Spirit who reveals the true nature and telos of humanity and creation.

This chapter will also explore Schmemann’s understanding of the symbol as being that medium through which humans participate in the life of God. Schmemann contends that our deepest Eucharistic experience of the presence of Christ was compromised through “illustrative symbolism” which was for centuries a characteristic

---


141 By “illustrative symbolism,” Schmemann means that the rites of the Eucharistic liturgy illustrate a narrative of the earthly life of Jesus. For example, during the procession of the gifts to the altar, which has
of the liturgical commentaries on the Byzantine liturgy. It is here that Schmemann’s thought differs somewhat in perspective and emphasis from that of Chauvet, though it is complementary. Such illustrative symbolism was, Schmemann believes, in part a direct result of the divorce between the principle of \textit{lex orandi est lex credendi} as the normative principle of the faith and experience of the believers. The degeneration of the notion of symbol as understood within the original vision and context of Patristic thought, according to Schmemann, obscures the authentic expression of liturgy. Layers of theatrical symbolism now must be peeled away for a deeper and more meaningful understanding of the dynamic of presence of Christ.

Finally, this chapter will explore Schmemann’s idea that the sacraments possess a cosmic and eschatological dimension. Regarding the cosmic dimension, a key element in Schmemann’s vision is that the world, by its very nature as a creation of God, is symbolic or sacramental—an idea found in Chauvet but which receives more exploration and emphasis in Schmemann’s work. The world is given so that we may \textit{participate} in the life and glory of the Trinitarian God. As summarized by Noble regarding Schmemann’s theological vision, the world can be considered the first symbol, the first sacrament. By its very nature the world evokes within us the referencing of all life to its Creator. In terms of the eschatological reality of sacraments, in particular the Eucharistic celebration, all reality is grounded in the Kingdom of God. The Eucharistic celebration of the Church is once again a lifting up, an \textit{ascent} to reality of the Kingdom where we participate in the fullness of the Trinitarian life. These ideas are central in Schmemann’s theology: the

\begin{itemize}
  \item become known as the "Great Entrance,” the procession signifies or portrays Jesus entrance to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Other examples of this type of illustrative symbolism will be addressed later in this chapter.
\end{itemize}
entire created order is permeated with Christ’s presence; hence the Eucharistic gifts find their *telos* in and through the Eucharistic offering of the High Priest and his sacrifice.

Key Elements of the Liturgical and Sacramental Crisis

Past and contemporary theologians of both the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches attest that a liturgical and sacramental crisis exists today within both of these traditions. This crisis is evidenced by the significant amount of research and publication by theologians and students of theology, who attempt to identify and respond to the critical issues and questions at hand within liturgical/sacramental theology. Such crises are not new, nor are they exclusively the result of the challenges of post-modernism; many precedents exist in theological history. In addition, both traditions face many of the same core questions at times, or at least they overlap. Thus, this crisis may be an axial moment for both churches as theologians and thinkers of both traditions find themselves faced with challenges quite similar in nature. Crises can serve as opportunities for decision making and growth as persons or institutions find themselves at a crossroads requiring careful reflection, discernment, and action.142

In this section, I will use Schmemann’s theological lens to (1) identify the causes of the current crisis and (2) to isolate and analyze key terms and theological constructs that may contribute to the crisis. It is imperative to keep in mind that the crisis did not occur overnight. It is characterized by layers of theological constructs, terminology, interpretive principles, and cultural and linguistic factors that make it extremely complex. Therefore, we cannot succumb to the temptation of attempting to find easy remedies for

---

142 For a further explanation of the sacramental crisis, its root causes, questions and analysis of some key elements, cf. Worgul, *From Magic to Metaphor*, 3-21.
brining about change instantaneously. The Orthodox and Catholic churches share over two millennia of history marked by theological upheavals and challenges from within and without, on a multitude of levels; hence a quick fix is neither desirable nor possible, though navigating through this venerable terrain of theological development and expression can appear a herculean task.

Even though the Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches find themselves on mutually familiar territory concerning their work in liturgical and sacramental theology and, specifically Eucharistic theology, the symptoms of the crisis differ slightly in each tradition. The stakes are high for both traditions in a number of respects, including the theological, and the celebration of the liturgy in both churches is viewed as the “Sacrament” of sacraments, the very life and heartbeat of the church. This common conviction can be and is the foundation for dialogue between the two churches and hopefully eventual reunion. Both traditions hold fast to the premise that it is within the context of the Eucharistic celebration that the church is most herself. The human experience in relationship with God depends on and flows from the Eucharistic celebration as does the sacramental life in general. On the level of praxis by the clergy and faithful, the liturgy is that experiential ground which is most frequently experienced by the people of God in terms of the immediacy and intimacy of the Risen Christ. His presence is made available to the faithful as he offers himself to them and they offer themselves to him and each other in the koinonia of agapic love.

Methodologies: Contributing to the Crisis

Historically speaking, it was natural that questions regarding the nature and purpose of the church in terms of ecclesiological developments and sacramental and
Eucharistic theology should become the focal point of theological discourse and analysis for centuries. Such analyses require methodologies, which are needed for a systematic presentation of the faith so that it may be studied seriously. The historical and theological circumstances in the church, whether Eastern or Western, have always demanded that it rise to the challenge of expressing its theology in a coherent and formal matter.

Schmemann, however, approaches his theology by calling into question not only the methodologies and constructs but also the very questions themselves. These questions, he believes, are the product of a certain fabricated theological base or mind-set. They have arisen out of models that are quite foreign to the original intent as expressed in the authentic ethos of the church. In other words, a dichotomy was generated by subjugating the various strata of ecclesial life to the limitations of the categorical and the analytic that serve as primary tools of theological expression.

This categorization of theological disciplines is obviously necessary for academic enterprise; hence Schmemann is not referring to a pedagogical dilemma in the “science” of theology but to a disruption in theological vision. Schmemann is not naïve. He believes, however, that employing these methods in the life and practice of the church is contrary to the integrative principle operative in the early church and that the normative principle in the liturgical life of the church via the _lex orandi_ has been compromised.

The more holistic theological vantage point of early Christian consciousness consisted of a prismatic view of ecclesial experience and expression rather than a collection of highly individualized entities or disciplines whose relationship to one another must be constructed through the theological enterprise of certain specialists. Such
an approach is characterized by Schmemann as “school/academic theology,” reminiscent of the great scholastics of the Middle Ages. A case in point is Schmemann’s analysis of the eventual disintegration of the notion of symbol, which eventually fell victim to the intellectualization of theology. Schmemann observes that

As a result of this breakdown, Christianity has come to look today, in the eyes of the world at least, like, on the one hand, a mere intellectual doctrine which moreover “cracks” under the pressure of an entirely different intellectual context, or, on the other hand mere religious institution which also “cracks” under its own institutionalism. And it is certainly not the adjective “holy” opposed to that doctrine and that institution that will by itself overcome the “credibility gap” and make Christianity the symbol it ceased to be. For the whole point is that holy is not and can never be a mere adjective, a definition sufficient to guarantee the divine authority and origin of anything. If it defines anything it is from the inside, not the outside. It reveals and manifests, vide Rudolf Otto, the “mysterium tremendum,” i.e., an inherent power which in a doctrine transcends its intellectualism and in an institution its institutionalism. It is this “holy”—the power of an epiphany—that is hopelessly missing today in both doctrine and institution, and this, not because of human sins and limitations, but precisely because of a deliberate choice: the rejection and dissolution of symbol as the fundamental structure of Christian “doctrine” and institution.143

143 Alexander Schmemann, For the Life of the World, 148.
Schmemann understands that use of the intellect is constituent to the human enterprise. It is “intellectualism” that Schmemann calls into question, just as he distinguishes the church as “institution” as from “institutionalism.” In addition, Schmemann emphasizes the point that the early Patristic writers worked as intellectuals, though not under a cloud of intellectualism:

…the post-patristic and “westernizing” theology places itself within a mental context deeply, if not radically, different from that of the early Church. I say mental and not intellectual because the difference belongs here to a level much deeper than that of intellectual presuppositions or theological terminology. Patristic theology, to be sure, was not less “intellectual” than scholasticism, and as to terminology it is precisely its unbroken continuity, the use of the same words, however altered in their meaning, that may have concealed from too many historians of theology the discontinuity between these two types of sacramental theology.  

It is this eventual molding of theology within the categories referenced above, so familiar to the western model of scholarship, that Schmemann challenges. Within the Eastern context of theology, Schmemann questions and criticizes the efficacy of these models in promoting the most authentic expression of the church. For Schmemann, the layers upon layers of academic theological processes have, in effect, led the church into the territory

---

144 Ibid., 136-137.
of imagery, language, logic, etc., which are quite foreign to what he considers the authentic theological voice of the church.

The crux of the matter for Schmemann, in terms of post-patristic theology, is the over-glorification of reason, which is then divorced from mystery. If the entire sacramental tradition of the church is viewed through a metaphysical and epistemological lens—i.e., is ultimately scientific—the existential, experiential, and celebrative aspects of all theology are relinquished. The task of contemporary theology, for Schmemann, is to free the theological enterprise from the fetters of those extrinsic methods and categories through a return to the organic Patristic mindset.

Schmemann maintains that the most profound example of such reductionism is the long and laborious debates regarding the Eucharistic elements relative to the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. For Schmemann, this approach to the Eucharistic elements is reductionist in that it isolates the elements from the greater narrative of the Eucharistic celebration for dissection, explanation, and analysis. The holistic sacramental/Eucharistic view that Schmemann proposes is compromised.

The Compromise in the Principle of “Lex Orandi est Lex Credendi” and Its Consequences

A part of the crisis to which we now turn is the disruption that took place within the life of the church relative to the axial principle lex orandi est lex credendi.¹⁴⁵ For

---

Schmemann, this rupture or divorce between these two mutually complementary and essential constitutive elements of the church’s life has had, and continues to have, dire consequences, which compromise the life of the church on numerous and fundamental levels. The divorce between these two constituent fundamental elements heralds one of the greatest challenges for theologians. The question arises, “What is so critical about this rupture and what, if any, are its consequences for theology?” This principle served, whether consciously or not, as an integrative standard for the church: it means that the prayer and belief of the church are inseparable. Furthermore, liturgy and theology are, in essence, doxological in nature. What is prayed is what is believed, what is believed is prayed. There is no room here for a dichotomy.

Schmemann would undoubtedly have acknowledged, as a further complication, Thomas Fisch’s proposal of two types or patterns that have emerged in both the Eastern and Western theological systems: the Patristic type and the scholastic type. These patterns have proven to be contributing forces that underpin the current dilemma of the rupture between the rule of prayer and the rule of belief:

(1) *The Patristic type.* The recent revival of Patristic studies shows that one of the major characteristics of the Fathers is precisely that of an organic connection

---

used this phrase to demonstrate a direct correlation between belief and prayer is still being debated. This axiom, nevertheless, is frequently employed by theologians as the justifying principle of the interrelatedness between belief and prayer. It may appear to the reader of this chapter that the emphasis placed on the importance of, and subsequent impact on theology, the principle of lex orandi est lex credendi, may indeed be quite heavy. Nevertheless, the impact of the “divorce,” to use Schmemann’s terminology, between these two principles is critical to a recovery of a certain sense of theological reflection relative to the nature and mission of the church through its liturgical prayer. We must take care not to overemphasize the importance of this divorce nor, at the same time, to underestimate its impact on the consciousness of the Church. For further illustration on the point, cf. Nicholas A. Jesson, “Lex Orandi, lex Credendi: Towards Liturgical Theology,” (Toronto: Unpublished paper, November, 2001), [http://www.ecumenism.net/jesson.htm](http://www.ecumenism.net/jesson.htm) (accessed November 11, 2012).
between their theological thought and their liturgical experience. *Lex orandi est lex credendi:* this axiom means that the liturgical tradition, the liturgical life, is a natural milieu for theology, its self-evident term of reference. The Fathers do not “reflect” on liturgy. For them it is not an object of theological inquiry and definition, but rather the living source and the ultimate criterion of all Christian thought: “Our opinion is in accordance with the Eucharist, and the Eucharist in turn established our opinion,” said St. Irenaeus.

(2) *The scholastic type.* By “scholastic” we mean, in this instance, not a definite school or period in the history of theology, but a theological structure which existed in various forms in both the West and the East, and in which all “organic” connection with worship is severed. Theology here has an independent, rational status; it is a search for a system of consistent categories and concepts: *intellectus fidei.* The position of worship in relation to theology is reversed: from a source it becomes an object, which has to be defined and evaluated within the accepted categories (e.g. definitions of sacraments). Liturgy supplies theology with “data,” but the method of dealing with these data is independent of any liturgical context. Moreover, the selection and classification of the data themselves are already a “product” of the accepted conceptual structure.\(^\text{146}\)

Fisch maintains that the “scholastic type” structure has remained the predominant framework of theological discourse in the Church until now. Nor did the Eastern Church

escape the strain of the scholastic structure, as one can easily confirm by consulting Orthodox or Eastern Christian theological manuals of the past. Those writings, penned under the burden of “western captivity” and “school theology,” exemplify the negative impact that such a theological construct has on theology.

In addition, Schmemann proposes that, because of the disruption between the rules of prayer and belief, a double crisis has ensued, which has a negative impact on the mind of the church:

The double crisis—of theology and liturgy—is, I submit, the real source of the general crisis which faces our Church today, and which must shape our agenda, if theology is for us more than a quiet “academic” activity; if we understand it as our specific charism and ministry within the Body of Christ. The Church’s life has always been rooted in the lex credendi, the rule of faith, theology in the deepest sense of the word; and in the lex orandi, her rule of worship, the leitourgia which always “makes her what she is”: the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit. Today, however, there is developing rapidly a dangerous alienation of the “real” Church from these two sources of her life. Such is our situation: such is the crisis whose challenge is upon us—whether we acknowledge it or not. To understand it in its deep causes is, therefore, the first and necessary step. Our question thus must be: why and how did this occur? I have no doubts as to the answer. If today both theology and liturgy have ceased, at least to a substantial degree, to perform within the Church the function which is theirs, thus provoking a deep crisis, it is because at first they have been divorced from one another: because the lex credendi has been alienated from the lex
orandi. When did this happen? During the post- Patristic “western captivity” of Orthodox theology in which in my opinion constitutes one of the main tragedies of the historical path of Eastern Orthodoxy. This “western captivity” consisted primarily in what Fr. Florovsky so aptly termed the “pseudomorphosis” of the eastern theological mind—the adoption by it of western thought forms and categories, of the western understanding of the very nature, structure, and method of theology. And the first, and indeed the most fateful, result of that “pseudomorphosis” was precisely a mutual alienation from one another of the lex credendi and the lex orandi.\textsuperscript{147}

Loss of the Experiential Nature of Liturgy

The demise of the inner-connectedness between the belief and prayer of the Church, and the consequent subjugation of theology to methodologies and mind-sets quite foreign to the organic faith of the early church resulted in the experiential aspect of the faith becoming distorted and eventually undermined. With Chauvet, Schmemann contends that the adoption of Western forms and categories of thought, as well as certain methodologies employed in doing theology, have had a less than beneficial outcome relative to the church’s understanding of its own nature and sacramental life.\textsuperscript{148}

\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., 52-53.

\textsuperscript{148} While Schmemann’s theological methodologies and points of reference are rooted in the Orthodox liturgical tradition and experience, as a theologian he was acutely aware, (and as an Orthodox painfully aware of his own tradition,) of the liturgical and sacramental challenges that both the Orthodox and Catholics face. Schmemann’s insights and contributions could prove helpful to both of these traditions not
Ecclesiologically speaking, Schmemann maintains that the early Fathers never left to posterity a *definition* of the church, either as institution or organism, but expressed in prayer and reflection the “nature” of the church on the level of their experiential plane.

The *pseudomorphosis* that Schmemann refers to is, as the term implies, a false re-contextualization of the theology of the church which had and continues to have significant ramifications for sacramental theology and indeed, all theology of the church. Such a re-contextualization was, according to Schmemann, a hallmark of theological thought and development in the western world due to historical considerations, in which western theology began to adopt a more objective or scientific approach to theology. Therefore, the theological enterprise was more focused on sets of propositions and proofs at the expense of the more Patristic and Eastern as well as authentically Western notion that theology is experiential in nature.

The Decline of Ecclesiology

The decline of ecclesiology is another symptom of the current crisis. This decline is manifested in what Schmemann refers to as the eventual objectification of the church through the medium of the institution. Such an objectification reduces the church and the sacraments to the level of discourse based on institutional language and imagery, by which is meant the language which expresses and identifies the church as an institution only in their own respective rights but on the level of mutuality. For insight into the personal life of Fr. Alexander relative to his many joys and sorrows, not only of his personal life regarding his family, coworkers and friends, but also of his life as an Orthodox proto-presbyter, author and dean of St. Vladimir’s Seminary, one can reference the text, *The Journals of Father Alexander Schmemann: 1973-1983*, trans. Julianna Schmemann (New York: St. Vladimir’s Press, 2000). In his journals, Fr. Alexander does not shy away from presenting the reader with the internal difficulties, struggles, challenges and failures that he witnessed within his own Orthodox Christian tradition. Fr. Alexander is very candid regarding the internal crises faced by the Orthodox Church on a multiplicity of levels, especially within liturgical theology.
either in purely cultic terms, or worse, as merely a sociological construct similar to other institutions which exist. In order amplify this point, Schmemann offers the following observation:

... the ecclesiological equation “institution – society – organism – Body of Christ” needs to be qualified. It would be a great error directly to apply the scriptural and traditional term “Body of Christ” to the Church as institution or society. In itself, “institution,” “society”—i.e., the visible, militant, hierarchical Church—is not the new life, the new being and the new age. It belongs to the structure and reality of the history of salvation and, therefore, to “this world.” But just as the Church of the Old Covenant, the old Israel, existed as a passage of the “old” into the “new”—yet what is being redeemed, renewed and transfigured through her is not the “Church,” but the old life itself, the old Adam and the whole of creation. And she is this passage precisely because as institution she is “bone of the bones and flesh of the flesh” of this world, because she stands for the whole creation, truly represents it, assumes all of its life and offers it—in Christ—to God. She is indeed instituted for the world and not as a separated “religious” institution existing for the specifically religious needs of men. She represents—“makes present”—the whole of mankind, because mankind and creation were called from the very beginning to be the Temple of the Holy Spirit and the receptacle of Divine Life. Yet it is only when she performs and fulfills this “passage,” when, in other terms, she transcends herself as “institution” and “society” and becomes indeed the new life of the new creation that she is the
Body of Christ. As institution the Church is in *this world* the sacrament of the Body of Christ, of the Kingdom of God and the world to come.\textsuperscript{149}

The Institutionalization of the Church

Schmemann, in terms of ecclesiology, brings to light the temptation to perceive of the church in purely institutional terms citing, however, that the church is instituted in this world in order to be precisely the *passage, the sacrament*, which enables humanity to participate in the *new life offered in Christ*. This reality referred to here is seen most clearly in the church as Eucharist which is

\ldots the very *act of passage* in which the Church fulfills herself as a new creation and, therefore, *the* Sacrament of the Church. In the Eucharist, the Church transcends the dimension of ‘institution’ and becomes the Body of Christ. It is the “*Eschaton*” of the Church, her manifestation of the world to come.\textsuperscript{150}

As passage, as sacrament, the Church transcends any radical institutionalism which can ultimately be referenced as an end in and of itself. The transcendent, eschatological nature of the church is muted in this case, if not totally ignored. This, for Schmemann, is another symptom of the current liturgical crisis which tends to divert the church from manifesting its own identity, an identity whose reference is ultimately Christ himself and his *Parousia*.

\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., 76-77.

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., 78.
In my opinion, one of the greatest tragedies of Church history, tragedy not mentioned in manuals, is that this eschatological character of the Christian leitourgia was little by little obscured in both theology and piety which "squeezed" it into categories alien to its primitive spirit. It is here indeed that one must look for the major cause of the process mentioned above: the progressive "weakening" of the idea of the Kingdom of God, its replacement with an individualistic and exclusively "futuristic" doctrine of the "last things." In the history of post-patristic theology, nothing I am sure was more one-sided and simply deficient than its treatment of sacraments and liturgy in general, of the Eucharist in particular. And the deficiency lay precisely in a double "disconnection": of the liturgy from ecclesiology and of the liturgy from eschatology. First from ecclesiology, i.e. the doctrine and the experience of the Church. Within the purely rational and juridical categories of the theology, which at first developed in the West but later had a deep impact in the East also, liturgy ceased to be understood and presented as the means of the Church's fulfillment, as the "locus Ecclesiae?" par excellence. The sacraments now came to be seen as "means of grace," as acts performed, to be sure, in and by the Church but aimed at individual sanctification rather than the edification and the fulfillment of the Church. But this also and of necessity meant their disconnection from eschatology. The initial understanding and experience of the liturgy as passage from the old into the new, from "this world" into the "world to come," as procession and ascension to the Kingdom, was obscured and replaced by its understanding in terms of a cult (public and private!) whose main aim is to
"satisfy our religious needs." The *leitourgia*—a corporate *procession* and *passage* of the Church toward her fulfillment, the sacrament of the Kingdom of God—was thus reduced to cultic dimension and categories among which those of obligation, efficiency, and validity acquired a central, if not exclusive, position. Finally, to this orientation of sacramental and liturgical theology corresponded an equally non-ecclesiological and non-eschatological orientation of liturgical piety. If the liturgy remained very much the heart and the center of the Church's life, if in some ways it became its almost unique expression, it was no longer comprehended as the act which "existentially" refers us to the three inseparable realities of the Christian faith: the world, the Church, the Kingdom.\(^{151}\)

The church is the eschatological church; the church is an epiphany in this world of the Kingdom of God inaugurated and yet to come:

For the Eucharist, we have said, is a *passage*, a procession leading the Church into “heaven,” into her fulfillment as the Kingdom of God. And it is precisely the reality of this passage into the *Eschaton* that conditions the transformation of our offering—bread and wine—into the new food of the new creation, of our meal into the Messianic Banquet and the *koinonia* of the Holy Spirit.\(^{152}\)

---


\(^{152}\)Fisch, *Liturgy and Tradition*, 82.
Admittedly, a variety of eschatologies exist, but, for Schmemann, any ecclesiological imagery or sacramental system based on any other reference than that of the Kingdom becomes, in the final analysis, an objectification of the church as mere institution, subjecting the church to the restrictions of definition. This is not to imply that the church does not take on an institutional character in this world. However, even as institution, the church’s life is in reference to the Risen Christ and the Kingdom which is to come.

To a certain extent, the institutionalization of the church, as presented and understood by Schmemann, can be traced back to the charter event of the divorce between the rule of prayer and the rule of belief. Simply put, when the church began to lose her self-perception of who she is and of her mission as rooted in and manifested in the rule of prayer/belief principle, she compromised herself ecclesiologically. The disintegrative seed was planted, and the roots were deeply imbedded in a new terrain that gave rise to a theological consciousness quite different from, if not in direct opposition to, the original intent of the ancient tradition. The return to the Eucharist, and the liturgical celebration of the church in general, is a locus of theological source and reflection, the self-evident truths of the Eucharistic celebration as voiced in prayer, word, gesture; this, for Schmemann, is not only the paradigm but the living source of all theology.

New Directions From Schmemann’s Theology

Schmemann’s fundamental premise for corrective measures is that we need a return to the Patristic mindset (phronema), which was indigenous to the early church.

experience and, of course, to the Patristic age. Such a strategic move would require a fundamental shift in thinking and methodology. This shift could offer a point of reference embedded in the *terra firma* of the greater Tradition and, at the same time, restore the integrity of that Tradition in ways that are effective in communicating it to contemporary humanity. A “return to the Fathers” is not to be understood as a simple parroting of their work, but a working appreciation for the legacy that they have bequeathed to the church as that which is normative and fundamental for the church’s self-perception and understanding regarding its nature and mission. Schmemann himself clarifies and offers a note of caution:

A mere reading of the Fathers, useful and essential as it is, will not suffice. For even Patristic texts can be made, and are often made, into “proofs” of theological systems deeply alien to the real “mind” of the Fathers. The “Patristic revival” of our time would miss completely its purpose if it were to result in a rigid “Patristic system” which in reality never existed. It is indeed the eternal merit of the Fathers that they showed the dynamic and not static nature of Christian theology, its power always to be “contemporary” without reduction to any “contemporaneousness,” open to all human aspirations without being determined by any of them. If the return to the Fathers were to mean a purely formal repetition of their terms and formulations, it would be as wrong and as useless as the discarding of the Fathers by “modern” theology because of their presumably “antiquated world view.”

---

Also, as a word of caution, Schmemann warns against any oversimplifications or misunderstandings of what it means to return to the Fathers:

…[W]hat exactly is meant by this "return" and how are we to perform it? To these questions no satisfactory answer has been given. Does it mean a mere repetition of what the Fathers said, on the assumption that they have said everything that is essential and nothing is needed but a recapitulation of their consensus? Such an assumption, even if it were a valid one, would certainly not solve the problem, as we stated it before—that of the present theological alienation. No collection of highly technical patrological monographs, no edition of patristic texts for the common use, would constitute in themselves the living and creative answer to the real questions of our time, or the real needs of the Church. There would still be the necessity of interpreting the patristic message, of its "resurrection" in the mind of the Church, or, in other words, the problem of the theological "breaking through." But we must remember that the Church has never taught that the Fathers answered all questions, that their theology is the whole theology and that the theologian today is merely a commentator of patristic texts. To transform the Fathers into a purely formal and infallible authority, and theology — into a patristic scholasticism — is, in fact, a betrayal of the very spirit of patristic theology, which remains forever a wonderful example of spiritual freedom and creativity. The "return to the Fathers" means, above all, the recovery of their spirit, of the secret inspiration which made them true witnesses of the Church.
We return indeed to the Fathers, and not only to their "texts," when we recover and make ours the experience of the Church not as mere "institution, doctrine, or system" to quote A. S. Khomiakov, but the all-embracing, all-assuming and all-transforming life, the passage into the reality of redemption and transfiguration. This experience, as we tried to show, is centered in the Eucharist, the Sacrament of the Church, the very manifestation and self-revelation of the Church. Eucharist, whether it is expressly referred to or not, is the organic source and the necessary "term of reference" of theology, for if theology is bearing witness to the faith and the life of the Church, to the Church as salvation and the new life in Christ, it bears witness primarily to the experience of the Church manifested, communicated and actualized in the Eucharist. It is in the Eucharist that the Church ceases to be "institution, doctrine, system" and becomes Life, Vision, Salvation, it is in the Eucharist that the Word of God is fulfilled and the human mind made capable of expressing the mind of Christ. Here then is the source of theology, of words about God, the "event" which transforms our human speculation into a message of Divine Truth.155

The church is a living church; a church of growth and development, and the insights of the Patristic writers and their contributions to the church and the world of their day are truly remarkable and creative, coming from their labor within the parameters of revealed truth. Having established the foundation upon which the work of renewal may

proceed, we turn now to some aspects of Schmemann’s vision of what that renewal would look like.

Restoring the Symbol: A New Light on the Eucharist

As noted earlier in this dissertation, the Orthodox Church was not compelled, as was the Roman Catholic Church, to address the issue of real presence, at least not on the level and with the intensity that Catholicism was compelled to do because of the challenges of the Reformation. This is not to imply, however, that Schmemann’s theological vision has little or nothing to offer on Eucharistic presence or “real presence.” Indeed, it was Schmemann who posited the question that, if Christ’s presence in the context of the Eucharistic celebration was not a “real” presence, then what type of presence is it or could it be? Of course, the nuances of the notion of presence are vast. In addition, the contemporary scholarship in sacramental theology is much more dynamic and fluid with regard to what presence implies or means in the first place as the quest of theology engages with the sciences, humanities, and philosophy. What Schmemann does accomplish, however, is to offer the Church a theological vision and construct uniquely Eastern in approach through which the “real presence” can be seen in a different if not entirely new light.

In order to examine adequately Schmemann’s assessment of the question of real presence, we must consider his observation of the theological mindset of Western sacramental theology, especially with regard to the notion of symbol. In chapter 1, we looked at Schmemann’s observation that if, in the Western debate, the presence is not “real,” the only other alternative is that it is “symbolical.” Schmemann reflects further on the critical issues surrounding the eventual dissolution of the term symbol relative to the
Eucharist, which, for Schmemann, unequivocally finds its reference in the Kingdom of God as a heavenly banquet:

We know now that this definition “slipped out” of our scholarly, theological explanations of the liturgy, which were adopted by Orthodox theology from the West. The main reason for this was the disintegration, in Christian consciousness, of the key concept of the symbol, its contraposition to the concept of reality and thus its reduction to the category of “illustrative symbolism.” Inasmuch as the Christian faith from the very beginning confessed precisely the reality of the change of the gifts of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ—“this indeed is the very body, and this is indeed the very blood of Christ”—any “confusion” of this reality with “symbolism” came to be seen as a threat to Eucharistic “realism” and hence also to the real presence of the body and blood of Christ on the altar. Here and now we must ask whether this understanding of the symbol and symbolism, their contraposition to “reality,” corresponds to the original meaning of the ideal of the “symbol,” and whether it applies to the Christian lex orandi, the liturgical tradition of the Church. To this fundamental question I answer in the negative. And this is precisely the heart of the matter: the primary meaning of “symbol” is in no way equivalent to “illustration.” In fact, it is possible for symbol not to illustrate, i.e., it can be devoid of any external similarity with that which it symbolizes.156

Schmemann maintains that the symbol is based within the context of faith, “…the evidence of the unseen” (Hebrews 11:1). For him, the language of the symbol and the symbolic is rooted in the faith of the church whose members are invited to engage and participate in the life-giving presence of Christ through the sacramental life of the church. The symbol finds its vocation as revealer and participatory agent in the larger context of the community of faith, particularly in the celebration of the Eucharist:

Therefore, if the symbol presupposes faith, faith of necessity requires the symbol. For unlike “convictions,” philosophical “points of view,” etc.; faith certainly is contact and a thirst for contact, embodiment and a thirst for embodiment: it is the manifestation, the presence, the operation of one reality within the other. All of this is the symbol (from σύμβολον, “unite,” “hold together”). In it—unlike a simple “illustration,” a simple sign, and even in the sacrament in its scholastic—rationalistic “reduction”—the empirical (or “visible”) and the spiritual or (“invisible”) are united not logically (this “stands for” that), nor analogically (this “illustrates” that), but epiphanically. One reality manifests (ἐπιυάνεια) and communicates the other, but—and this is immensely important—only to the degree to which the symbol itself is a participant in the spiritual reality and is able or called upon to embody it. In other words, in the symbol everything manifests the spiritual reality, but not everything pertaining to the spiritual reality appears embodied in the symbol.  

157

Ibid., 39.
Schmemann maintains that the symbol does not exhaust the reality it symbolizes, nor does it exhaust in any way our experience of the reality conveyed by the symbol. Its purpose is precisely not to completely satisfy our desire—for example, for Christ through the Eucharist—but to communicate the “totally other” as other to us in such a way that our communion remains on the level of a continuous desire, hunger, and thirst for Christ—always in reference to the eschatological banquet of the Kingdom of God. In other words, the inaugurated manifestation of the Kingdom in the person of Jesus Christ will find ultimate fulfillment on the day to come, the day of the Holy Spirit, in the eschaton. This eschatological notion runs deep in Schmemenn’s Eucharistic theology.

For Schmemann, the purification of the crucial notion of the symbol is an essential component in the rediscovery and reformulation of a theological vision rooted in the Patristic mind in concert with the lex orandi of the church. Of what, according to Schmemann, would this purification consist? Schmemann identifies at least two fundamental flaws that, if addressed, could result in a deeper understanding and appreciation for a more authentic and sound notion of symbol and, ultimately, of the Eucharistic presence.

First, when the notion of the symbol is wrested from the worldview and experience of the Patristic theological vision, it loses its fundamental qualities of revelation/epiphany and participation. Here, revelation and epiphany refer to the symbol as the revealer of “the other” on a multiplicity of levels; participation implies that the symbol is a participatory agent in opening up the “other” to establish a relationship between humanity and the Divine. Second, and perhaps the more crucial point, is the eventual degradation of the integrity of the symbol because it has been situated within a
false epistemological and existential construct wherein the symbol and the symbolic are viewed as being in *direct opposition* to that which is understood as the *real*. For Schmemann, the latter is the more debilitating as a contributing factor to the dilemma in current sacramental/Eucharistic theology relative to the power and efficacy of the symbol in revealing the presence of the Risen Christ. In addition, the symbol and the symbolic are compromised in their ability to serve as the grounding for participation in Christ through the sacrament of communion and ultimately as the gift of *theosis*—our divinization as partakers of divine nature:

In refining the notion of symbol, it remains that, the *symbol as symbol*, the *sacrament as sacrament*, cannot be relegated to a simple functionary role nor can it be subjugated to mere analysis. The symbol is situated in a broader vision of the Divine-human dialectic which, on the experiential level, escapes the precision of critical analysis and retains its fluidity as a natural revealer of the *mystery*. The symbol speaks and informs on a multiplicity of levels and with a certain profundity as a revelatory sign and unifying agent of the natural sacramental nature of God’s creation, a theme seminal to Schmemann’s sacramental/Eucharistic theology:

If, for the Fathers, symbol is the key to sacrament, it is because sacrament is in continuity with the symbolic structure of the world in which “omnes…creaturae sensibiles sunt signa rerum sacrum.” And the world is symbolical—“signum rei sacrae”—in virtue of its being created by God; to be “symbolical” belongs thus to its ontology, the symbol being not only the way to perceive and understand reality, a means of cognition, but also a means of *participation*. It is then the “natural symbolism of the world”—one can almost say its “sacramentality”—
makes the sacrament possible and constitutes the key to its understanding and apprehension.\textsuperscript{158}

Note Schmemann’s positing of the symbol as being not in contradiction to the natural order, and equally noteworthy is Schmemann’s contention that the symbol is the “key” to the sacraments because of the natural affiliation or continuity between symbol and sacrament as expressive of the sacramental, symbolic structure of the world. For Schmemann, the world is inherently symbolic and the human discovers this symbolic order not through rational discourse or a sort of intellectualism, but by recognition through the symbolic order, proposed also by Chauvet, as the experiential ground of divine revelation and communication.

A further contribution to Schmemann’s thoughts can be gleaned from the following insight of Ivan Noble:

Although Schmemann lived most of his life in the West, he means by “knowledge” something else than post-enlightenment western philosophy or theology. He emphasizes that our knowledge of God starts with the intuition of the divine mystery. The first intuitive knowledge, then, can be expressed only by means of symbols. They allow the revelation of the divine other precisely as the “other,” they can speak of visibility of the invisible as invisible, the knowledge of the unknowable as unknowable, the presence of the future as future. In other words, it belongs to their nature not to reduce, not to try and substitute relational

\textsuperscript{158} Schmemann, \textit{For the Life of the World}, 139.
knowledge for explanation, for something smaller, more similar to us creatures and to our creaturely structure of thinking. Schmemann stands in line here with other Orthodox theologians, like Lossky, Meyendorff or Zizioulas, as he opposes the reduction of knowledge to its discursive part and the isolation of knowledge from mystery. He states that “theology is not only related to the “mysterion” but has in it its source and condition of its very possibility. Theology as proper words and knowledge about God is the result of the knowledge of God—and in Him of all reality.159

The Challenge of Liturgical/Illustrative Symbolism in the Eastern Liturgical Experience

With the devolution of the rich and profound message of the symbol and the symbolic order, there came another sign of the divorce between lex orandi and lex credendi, manifest in what Schmemann calls “liturgical symbolism”:

Taken at its face value, the symbolism usually ascribed to the Byzantine liturgy as its essential element seems (emphasis mine) to present no great problem. There exist a substantial number of Byzantine and post-Byzantine—Greek, Russian, Serbian, etc.—commentaries in which all liturgical acts, as well as the liturgy in

its totality, are interpreted as being above all *symbolic representations*, i.e., as acts “representing,” “signifying,” and thus “symbolizing,” *something else*, be it an event of the past, an idea, or a theological affirmation. This symbolism, common to all Byzantine worship, is especially elaborate in the commentaries on the central act of that worship—the celebration of the Eucharist. The divine liturgy is for all commentators virtually a symbolic representation of the life and ministry of Christ from His birth in Bethlehem to His glorious ascension to heaven. The *prothesis*, i.e., the ritual preparation of the Eucharistic gifts of bread and wine, is the symbol of Christ’s birth: the so-called “Little Entrance” or the Introit, the symbol of His manifestation to the world; the “Great Entrance,” or the procession with the gifts to the altar, the symbol of Christ’s burial and of His triumphant entrance into Jerusalem.\(^{160}\)

Schmemann comments that this type of symbolism seems, at first glance, to be somewhat harmless. In fact, however, it serves only as another diversionary element in the dialectic between the worshipper and the prayers of the liturgy. The worshipper is literally introduced to another world, and not the world of the symbol or symbolic order upon which both Schmemann and Chauvet base their theological positions. The hermeneutic of the “illustrative symbolic” carries with it an excess baggage of and interpretation imagery which clouds the essential nature and meaning of liturgical prayer and gesture.

---

With such symbolism, an experiential divide is created, a dichotomy between that which is celebrated and that which is perceived; that which is prayed as being that which informs and shapes the faithful in Christ through the celebrative actions of the church. In other words, the believers are “steps removed” from the synergistic actions of prayer and belief which is so crucial to the Eucharistic witness and salvific efficacy of the Eucharist. In addition, by adding on this layer of diversionary language and imagery identified as “illustrative symbolism,” the fullness of the faith becomes clouded if not altogether distorted. And, at worst, the believers become reduced to spectators of a divine drama of sorts because this type of illustrative symbolism is born out of and reinforces a perception of the liturgy as a spiritual commentary. This break is evidenced by the plethora of “illustrative symbolic” images and explanations which became characteristic of the Byzantine liturgical commentaries. The liturgical gestures, and indeed the liturgy itself, became the stage for the reenactment of the various and events in the earthly life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Once again, one is faced with the fallout from the radical distancing of the symbolic from the real—the symbolic now taking on a new form in its devolutionary journey.

When and where did this symbolic interpretation of the celebration of the Eucharist take place? Hugh Wybrew provides some observations about its beginnings:

To the third century, if no earlier, may be traced the roots of that symbolic interpretation of the Liturgy which was to become an integral part of the Byzantine and Orthodox tradition. The third-century Alexandrian theologian Origen, building upon an earlier tradition, developed a theology of the Christian mystery which profoundly influenced subsequent Eastern theology. The mystery
is the reality of salvation, made present in a visible sign which both reveals and conceals it. Origen applied this sacramental principle to the whole of the Christian economy. Origen’s teaching about the Christian mystery and the Liturgy as one means by which it may apprehended is the soil from which grew one strand of the Byzantine tradition of the liturgical interpretation and initiation. Developed by Dionysius the Areopagite in the fifth century and Maximus the Confessor in the seventh, it was take up and given its final form in the fifteenth century by Symeon of Thessalonika.\textsuperscript{161}

It was Origen who, in his attempt to foster a certain sense of the inner spiritual meaning of the various images, rites, and language of the Eucharistic celebration, set the stage for later developments in the symbolic interpretation which became germane to the Eastern Church. Such a symbolic interpretation, while finding its roots in the Origenistic hermeneutic of liturgy, developed vigorously in the East and, to this day, remains operative to certain degrees within the liturgical consciousness of the Eastern Church as evidenced in catechetical and liturgical commentaries.

If indeed Origen planted the seeds for the development of illustrative symbolism as characterized by Wybrew, the apex of this development was reached in the later commentaries born out of catechetical and pedagogical necessities of the church. Citing the work of Father Rene Bornert entitled, “The Byzantine Commentaries of the Divine

\textsuperscript{161} Wybrew, The Orthodox Liturgy, 24-27.
Schmemann relays Bornert’s insights into the development of the symbolic interpretations of the liturgy:

à l'aube de l'ére bizantine et médiévale nous voyons dans l'est, aussi bien que dans l'ouest, la floraison d'un nouveau genre littéraire: le "commentary" mystique ; Son but et tâche sont différents de ceux de l'instruction catechetical. Ce dernier a été visé les catechumens, et son but était de préparer le futur membre de l'église pour la participation appropriée au Church'; culte de s. Le commentaire mystique est adressé au fidèle. Son but est d'expliquer le mysterion, la signification spirituelle, la réalité spirituelle, cachée, pourtant le présent derrière les signes évidents et les rites de la liturgie.

Fisch summarizes Bornert’s idea as follows:

The origin of the symbolic interpretation of the liturgy is to be found in the catechetical instructions given in preparation for baptism to the newly converted. This pre-baptismal and post-baptismal initiation, in turn, reflects and is patterned after the scriptural exegesis, the interpretation of the Holy Scripture as it develops in two main traditions—the Alexandrian, with its emphasis on theoría, the spiritual or anagogical meaning of Scripture, and the Antiochian, with its affirmation of historia, the sequence of events revealed as history of salvation.

---

What is important here, however, is that in both traditions the liturgy, similar in this to Scripture, is considered a source of gnosis, the knowledge of God revealing Himself in His saving acts. Then, “at the dawn of the Byzantine and medieval era,” writes Father Bornert, “we see in the East, as well as in the West, the blossoming of a new literary genre: the ‘mystical commentary.’ Its purpose and task are different from those of the catechetical instruction. The latter was aimed at the catechumens, and its purpose was to prepare the future member of the Church for proper participation in the Church’s worship. The mystical commentary is addressed to the faithful. Its purpose to explain the mysterion, the spiritual meaning, the spiritual reality, hidden, yet present behind the visible signs and rites of the liturgy.”

It was Maximus the Confessor, in his Mystagogia, who presented perhaps the fullest development and expression of this approach. According to Schmemann, although the antecedents of illustrative symbolism were founded and formed in earlier liturgical commentaries, Maximus was the one who eventually presented a codified and integrated commentary, providing another springboard for the development of illustrative symbolism.

We might well ask, in light of Schmemann’s assessment of illustrative symbolism thus far: In what way(s) does such symbolism hinder the faithful in their response to the invitation of the liturgy to experience the presence of the Risen Christ? In fact, was it not

---

163 Fisch, Liturgy and Tradition, 122-123.
established earlier in this dissertation that the “manifold presence of Christ”\textsuperscript{164} can be communicated under many and various images and forms within the Eucharistic celebration, as was made clear in the documents of Vatican II? Why then, should an illustrative model, which communicates through liturgical rites the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ as a re-enactment of his life, passion, death, and resurrection, be problematic? Schmemann’s difficulty arises from the notion of the symbol as it relates to the *mysterion*, which he explains thus:

The *mysterion* therefore means both: the very content of faith, the knowledge of the divine mystery revealed in Christ, and the saving power communicated through and in the Church. As to the symbol, it is, within this theology, the mode of the presence and action of the *mysterion* and primarily, although not exclusively, of its presence and action in the liturgy, which is the privileged locus of the symbol. The symbol—and this is very important—is thus the very reality of that which it symbolizes. By representing, or signifying, that reality it makes it present, truly represents it. Nowhere is this symbolic realism more evident than in the application by Maximus of the term “symbol” to the Body and Blood of Christ offered in the Eucharist, an application which, in the context of today’s opposition between the symbolic and the real, would be plain heresy.\textsuperscript{165}


\textsuperscript{165} Ibid., 122-123.
Hence the symbol, within the essential context of *mysterion*, cannot be relegated to a diminished role under the corrupted form of the understanding of symbol as presented within the framework of illustrative symbolism.

If indeed the symbol, whose “privileged locus” is the liturgical celebration of the Eucharist, and itself serves as the ultimate mode of the presence of Christ to and with the faithful, then truly the symbol is divested of its unique relational principle of koinonia when it is reduced to being a mere illustrator:

The history of religions shows us that the more ancient, the deeper, the more “organic” a symbol, the less it will be composed of such “illustrative” qualities. This is because the purpose and function of the symbol is *not* to illustrate (this would presume the *absence* of what is illustrated) but rather to *manifest* and to *communicate* what is manifested. We might say that the symbol does not so much “resemble” the reality that it symbolizes as it participates in it, and therefore it is capable of communicating it in reality. In other words, the difference (and it is a radical one) between our contemporary understanding of the symbol and the original one consists in fact that while today we understand the symbols as the representation or sign of an *absent* reality, something that is not really in the sign itself, …in the original understanding it is the manifestation and presence of the *other* reality—but precisely as *other*, which under given circumstances, cannot be manifested and made present in any other way than symbol.  

---

166 Schmemann, *The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom*, 38.
To commune with the living God on every level and dimension of human existence through the symbol of the Body and Blood of Christ, is a far cry from watching a representative drama of the life’s work of Jesus of Nazareth through a “symbolic narrative.”

Based on Schmemann’s analysis and reflection, the illustrative symbolism which became so popular in the life of the Church is not a viable construct for a contemporary methodology, especially in the church’s experience of the Risen Christ in the Eucharistic celebration.

Restoring the Experiential Nature of the Liturgy

In line with this thinking, Schmemann believes that “[t]he leitourgia—being the unique expression of the Church, of its faith and of its life—must become the basic source of theological thinking, a kind of locus theologicus par excellence.”167 The liturgy is the celebration of the church as church and is simultaneously the revelatory and celebrative nexus of theology, the recipient and the offerer of revealed truth in the person of Jesus Christ. One can deduce therefore, that the entire sacramental life of the church is rooted in the self-offering ministry of the High Priest, Jesus Christ, who offers himself to us in sacramental celebrations.

The fundamental meaning and purpose of the μυστήριον for Schmemann reflects his penchant for an experiential/revelatory approach to theology. The “mysterion” should not be relegated only to the sacraments per se; rather, it should encompass our knowledge

of God in and through the salvation event of Christ. Relative to knowledge, symbolic knowledge, in the proper sense as proposed by Schmemann, is experiential knowledge rooted in the structure of human existence, as humanity embraced by God in agapic love and life to be shared by all through Christ. Knowledge, in the deepest sense of the word, as mediated through the symbolic, resonates with the deepest recess of the human heart, a calling of like to like, a union of humanity with the divine through the Incarnate Logos.

If, in the traditional theological construct of Schmemann, one can speak of Eucharistic presence, it is precisely in terms of the all-encompassing act of God in Christ who redeems and transfigures all reality as expressed and experienced most assuredly and poignantly in the Eucharistic celebration, i.e., the liturgy. Fisch observes that “[a]s in Schmemann, liturgy is for Chauvet, ‘a theological locus of first importance,’ because it ‘shows us, not by mode of reasoning but by mode of “symbolic action”’ how Christian existence is born and rooted namely, ‘that no one becomes a Christian except by being taken into the common “womb” of the church…’”168

This presence cannot simply be reduced to the Eucharistic gifts in isolation from the whole of salvation history and all that is accomplished in the celebration of the liturgy. It is precisely the nemesis of reductionism and isolationism in theology which greatly contributed to the emergence of opposing forces as a foreign disruptive element within an otherwise integrative construct characteristic of a sound theological system.

168 Ibid., 7.
The World as Sacrament

In this section we come to perhaps the most important contribution of Schmemann’s theology: his view of the entire world as sacrament. Schmemann decried the dualism present in modern thinking, which has found its way even into the fabric of the liturgical/sacramental life of the church, and he identifies this dualism as a contributing factor to the liturgical/sacramental crisis. Ironic as it may seem, Schmemann contends that the dilemma of dualism, which is embedded in the language and psyche of a significant cross-section of Christianity, can itself be ascribed to the phenomenon of *religion* with the many ideologies and practices that are the fruits of this phenomenon.

Throughout his works, Schmemann maintains that Jesus Christ’s salvific mission was *not* to establish a religion. Rather, it is Christ’s vocation to reveal the Truth about and of God, and indeed reveal God himself, and to restore humanity and the cosmos in and through Him with the Holy:

> Nowhere in the New Testament, in fact, is Christianity presented as a cult or as a religion. Religion is needed where there is a wall of separation between God and man. But Christ who is both God and man has broken down the wall between man and God. He has inaugurated a new life, not a new religion.\(^{170}\)

---


\(^{170}\) Ibid., 19-21.
Dualism reaches far back into the recesses of the “religious” consciousness of humanity, as evidenced in some of the beliefs and practices of the ancient indigenous religions. This dualistic world-view is characterized by a decisive division between what is known as the “sacred” and the “profane.” The sacred, meaning the “extraordinary” or the “supernatural,” is applied to the religious, while the profane refers to the mundane and ordinary world. These two aspects are, in most religious systems, held in direct opposition. This critical dichotomy serves as a misplaced theological base that results in negative consequences for Christian theology, and especially sacramental and Eucharistic theology.

On an anthropological level, this dualistic approach places in opposition the natural affiliation between God and humanity, humanity and nature, in which the latter find their ultimate fulfillment in the life of the church. On the ecclesial/sacramental level, this dualistic view creates a mindset in which the church and its sacramental celebrations are viewed as mere conduits for the reception of “supernatural” realities which, within this formula, are presented once again as two separate categories in opposition. The transfiguration and renewal of creation through the incarnation of Christ and his salvific work as the Priest of creation and humanity par excellence, becomes muted or even entirely lost in this paradigm. Here we are dealing with a consciousness informed by a dualistic presupposition which creates a

…fundamental opposition of the spiritual to the material. “Spiritual” versus “material,” “sacred” versus “profane,” “supernatural” versus “natural”—such
were for centuries the only accepted, the only understandable moulds and
categories of religious thought and experience.\textsuperscript{171}

It is these molds and categories of thought that Schmemann recognizes as being
fundamentally flawed; yet they have shaped and continue to shape sacramental theology.

Schmemann maintains that the biblical account of creation speaks nowhere of
this dualistic mindset; quite the opposite, the pre-lapsarian image of creation evokes in
the reader of the Genesis account a sense of profound unity between God, humanity, and
the cosmos, although this unity is disrupted through the fall. It is through Jesus Christ
that this unity is restored and celebrated in the sacramental life of the church, most
notably and definitively in the Eucharistic celebration. The liturgy is a celebration of the
“recreation of creation.”

Schmemann understands Adam’s charge to name the animals as a confirmation
of his vocation as the steward of the earth and its plentitude, but he also believes that it
indicates Adam’s vocation, and every human’s vocation, as a priest who blesses God in
thanksgiving for what he has been given by God:

To name a thing, in other words, is to bless God for it and in it. And in the Bible
to bless God is not a “religious” act or a “cultic” act, but the very \textit{way of life}. God
blessed the world, blessed man, blessed the seventh day (that is, time), and this
means that He filled all that exists with His love and goodness, made all this “very
good.” So the only natural (and not “supernatural”) reaction of man, to whom

\textsuperscript{171} Ibid., 14.
God gave this blessed and sanctified world, is to bless God in return, to know, so to speak, the meaning of the thirst and hunger that constitutes his life. “Homo sapiens,” “homo faber”...yes, but, first of all, “homo adorans.” The first, the basic definition of man is that he is the priest. He stands in the center of the world and unifies it in his act of blessing God, of both receiving the world from God and offering it to God—and by filling the world with this Eucharist, he transforms his life, the one that he receives from the world, into life in God, into communion with Him. The world was created as the “matter,” the material of one all-embracing Eucharist, and man was created as the priest of this cosmic sacrament.  

Schmemann once said that probably the first utterance by Adam when he beheld God’s creation was, “thank you.” It is this Adamic realization and response that the church celebrates Eucharistically. Humanity and the cosmos, indeed all things, are “recapitulated” in Christ. Furthermore, the creation is a sacrament in that it is a work of God sealed by his “very good” and offered as a symbol of our communion with Him as it is ultimately referenced the Kingdom of God through liturgy.

Schmemann’s contention is that dualism and its overall negative impact in Christian theory and practice remain a force to be reckoned with and that they present a challenge to the long-held operative systems within sacramental theology. The implications of Schmemann’s position is that those engaged in current sacramental

172 Ibid., 15.
theology should be responsive to the imperative of returning to the Patristic, liturgical worldview that is characterized by a holistic approach and that can be informed by a certain “Eucharistic consciousness.”

The question remains: in what way(s) does this dualistic tendency affect the church’s experience and understanding regarding the Eucharistic presence? For Schmemann, Eucharistic presence, and all that this terminology carries within itself and the manifold images that it evokes, is based on the conviction that it is the Risen Christ who brings all things to the Father in thanksgiving as his self-offering. Through Christ’s transformative presence, the Church as sacrament is the witness and affirmation in the world of the cosmic and eschatological renewal of all things on a macro-scale. This union, or communion, is celebrated in Christ via the Eucharistic gesture of Christ himself. This dynamic of restoration, transfiguration, and deification of humanity proves to be the very antithesis of any form of dualism as understood and described by Schmemann. Dualism is eradicated in the Eucharistic vision of the church which is the sacrament of wholeness and integrity, the pleroma of faith. “In the Eucharist, everything (the Kingdom of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit) is accomplished by the Son, and revealed by the Holy Spirit.”


So far, we have seen Schmemann’s conviction that the liturgy as *ecclesia* is the sacrament through which God’s salvation is celebrated. Thus, though they acknowledged that the church is indeed the body of Christ, the body of believers, the Patristic writers shied away from providing any firm definition of the nature of the church. Allegories, characteristics, metaphors, descriptors, yes—but definition, no. Thus, as Schmemann contends and as cited earlier in this chapter, the church cannot be reduced to a mere institution or, even more alarming, a propagator of a certain type of institutionalism that proves detrimental to the church’s mission and witness in the world. Avery Dulles, in his work, *Models of the Church*, describes the not-so-subtle differences between the church as *institution* and the institutionalism of the church. The former, according to Dulles, is understandable in that, with no operational institutional framework, the church simply could not work effectively or even perhaps survive in this world. The latter characterizes the church and its self-perception, and hence its projection to the world, as a highly structured complex that can become weighed down by its own internal design. What results from institutionalism is an exclusivist ecclesiology which is complicated by its own structure. In other words, the church becomes an “end in and of itself” rather than the “transparent” sacrament through which the Divine-human dialectic is celebrated.

Dulles’ distinction between institution and institutionalism helps to clarify Schmemann’s own idea of the church as sacrament, the epiphany of the new creation. The church, if perceived as a mere social institution, misses the mark of its truly sacramental and eschatological nature. In relation to the Eucharistic presence of Christ,
Schmemann sees the reality of the church not as an institution but as a field of synergy, where God and humanity, through Christ, are united in the mystery of agapic love.

The Church as sacrament, the world as sacrament: these two broad and inclusive tenets of Schmemann’s sacramental vision give rise to an understanding of the church as rooted in eschatological hope. The world, church, and Kingdom bear an intrinsic interrelatedness which is rooted in a shared and complementary modality:

Schmemann articulates the relation between the world, the church and the kingdom the following way. The church is rooted in the world. It bears all the positives and the negatives of this rootedness. Its history is bound up with the history of the world. Schmemann recognizes that Orthodox theology places the beginning of the church in paradise and interprets its life as a manifestation of the Kingdom of God. He holds together the eschatological dimension of the church, whence the tension between participation in divine life and alienation also enters it. The church like the world is a symbolic, sacramental place; it is a passage to the new creation. “The church, as visible society and organization, belongs to this world,” says Schmemann. She is vulnerable and struggles with the same problems as the rest of the world, yet “she is instituted…to stand for the world,” and to “assume…all the natural forms of human existence in the world… in order to reveal and manifest the true meaning of creation as fulfillment in Christ, to announce to the world its end and the inauguration of the Kingdom.”

176 Noble, “From Sacramentality,” 8.
Cosmology, ecclesiology, eschatology\textsuperscript{177}—these three realities are intertwined within salvation history. The treacherous dichotomies inherent in religion, the utopian world of a realized eschatology referenced only to this world, the super-natural bifurcation of reality as envisioned through the categories of “sacred and profane,” all of these false ideological world views serve only to maintain a certain status quo in theology devoid of its ultimate reference point of the Kingdom of God.

Because the church herself is sacrament, she becomes the locus of the Eucharistic experience of the presence of Christ, and Schmemann views the liturgy in terms of a journey or procession. The eschatological aspect is reinforced here in that the journey and procession is in reference to the Kingdom of God. To exemplify this notion, Schmemann appeals to the synaxis of the faithful as they begin their journey from their homes to gather “as the church” in order to constitute the church or, as Schmemann emphasizes, to be transformed into the Church of God. The synaxis entails a leaving of “this world” to what Schmemann describes as another dimension, another vantage point in that the worshippers are now entering into the presence of Christ. It is in the gift of presence by the power and witness of the Holy Spirit within the church that humanity and the cosmos are redeemed, transfigured. For the human, \textit{theosis}\textsuperscript{178} is gifted through the \textit{mysterion} of the presence of the risen Christ. All is renewed in the resurrection, including the cosmos, or what may be referred to as the cosmic dimension of the Eucharist.


\textsuperscript{178} The notion of “theosis” or “divinization” is more fully explored and developed in chapter 4 of this dissertation.
Schmemann makes clear in his theological vision that there is a need to rediscover the cosmic dimension of Eucharistic celebration. This rediscovery extends far beyond a simple acknowledgment of what might be considered to be a dispensable option for contemporary sacramental theology. This cosmic dimension of the sacramental life, indeed life itself, cannot be relegated to a simple illustrative novelty or an appendage to the nature of sacraments in general. This cosmic dimension is rooted in the very fabric of the church as the sacrament in which believers are engaged in the deification, or theosis, of humanity. Yet, as Schmemann contends strongly in his works, God sent his Son to redeem this world—the world which, as referenced above, is by its very nature symbolic or sacramental. The priestly vocation of the human, in and through the High Priest Jesus Christ, is to offer the fruits of this world so that it may be redeemed, saved, and transfigured to its future glory in the here and now.

The lost or alienated state of humanity, as a result of the fall (and consequently the fall of the cosmos), is evidenced by a certain alienation of humanity from the cosmic order—i.e., the world we inhabit. When, for humanity, the world is no longer seen in its natural sacramental state or order, but rather as a hostile place or reduced merely to an object to be manipulated, then creation becomes an imposition, an external entity of the worst kind. Not only is this disrupted vision evidenced throughout the scriptural texts, in Genesis and the writings of St. Paul as the general condition resulting from the fall, but also is fueled by certain elements and ideologies inherent within secularism or human secularism. For Schmemann, secularism, despite a variety of definitions and descriptions, can be summarized in the following manner:
Secularism, I submit, is above all a \textit{negation of worship}. I stress: not of God’s existence, not of some kind of transcendence and therefore of some kind of religion. If secularism in theological terms is a heresy, it is primarily a heresy about man. It is the negation of man as a worshipping being, as \textit{homo adorans}: the one for whom worship is the essential act which both “posits” his humanity and fulfills it. It is the rejection as ontologically and epistemologically “decisive,” of the words which “always, everywhere and for all” were the true “epiphany” of man’s relation to God, to the world and to himself: “It is meet and right to sing of Thee, to bless Thee, to praise Thee, to give thanks to Thee, and to worship Thee in every place of Thy dominion…”\textsuperscript{179}

Humans struggle on at least two existential levels; the first being the loss of the natural sacramental/Eucharistic vision of the pre-lapsarian experience, the second relative to contemporary life influenced by what Schmemann characterizes as the age of secularism. It is within the parameters of a secularist/humanistic worldview that the world, creation, and matter are viewed not as a gift, as a way of communion with God, but as a reality closed in on itself and an end in itself. This is precisely the fallen Adamic vision of the world wherein the world is no longer seen and experienced in sacramental terms but in reference solely to humanity’s disordered needs and desires. Referring to Ludwig Feurbach’s adage, “Man is what he eats,” Schmemann contends that it does indeed contain a certain truth. Humanity eats of this world, fallen and suffering under the pale of

\textsuperscript{179} Schmemann, \textit{For the Life of the World}, 118.
death. The evil one exists, the evil one still battles and convicts humanity as the enemy and antagonist. And in this dead world, humanity perceives that the world is the only true source of life. However, it is in the redemptive acts of Christ, particularly as remembered and celebrated in the Eucharist, that this world is redeemed. This world as food finds its ultimate ability to give life not in the biological sense, but only as creation is taken up into the Paschal mystery where our true food and sustenance is Christ.

It is in the Eucharistic consciousness of the church, which permeates all sacramental reality, that the integrity of creation and humanity’s relationship with it is healed and transformed. In the material elements of the sacraments—bread and wine, the oil of prayer offered in the sacraments of baptism and healing—nature itself is redeemed and celebrated as that which is not only very good, but as that which is transfigured and brought to its ultimate fulfillment.\(^{180}\) The human and creation is once again “posited” in the world as redeemed, the world of eschatological hope and joy:

To baptize by water and the spirit in the likeness of Christ’s death and resurrection; to “come together as Church” on the Lord’s day, to hear His Word and “to eat and drink at His table in His Kingdom;” to relate, through the “liturgy of time,” all time, all cosmos – its time, matter and life – to Christ who is to “fill all things with Himself”: all this was not understood as mere “cultic acts” but

above all, as the fulfillment by the Church of her very nature, of her cosmical and eschatological calling.\textsuperscript{181}

It is through the \textit{leitourgia} of the Church, wherein the Church’s experience of the Kingdom of God is manifest, that she truly becomes “what she is: the sacrament, in Christ, of the Kingdom.”\textsuperscript{182} This cosmic redemption is celebrated most poignantly in a hymn to the Theotokos sung at the Liturgy of St. Basil the Great: “All of creation rejoices in you, O full of grace, the assembly of angels and the race of men. O sanctified temple and spiritual paradise, the glory of virgins, from whom God incarnate became a child, our God before the ages. He made your body into a throne, and your womb more spacious than the heavens. All of creation rejoices in you, O full of Grace, glory to you.” Recall that the genesis of humanity takes place not only in the created order but also as the created order. Humanity, by virtue of being created in the image of God, is the apex of God’s creation; as somatic beings we are situated in a world ordered and reordered by God.

Finally, central to Schmemann’s theological enterprise is the act of \textit{anamnesis}, remembrance in thanksgiving. It is through the sacramental act of \textit{remembrance} that the Kingdom of God, the eschaton, is brought in our midst through the liturgy in the person of Jesus Christ. For Schmemann, the church is the remembrance of Christ. This remembrance is not relegated to a mere psychological recalling of the historical Jesus and


\textsuperscript{182} Ibid., 137.
all of his redemptive acts, nor in Eucharistic terms, is remembrance understood simply as the cognitive task of the church to “remember” Jesus in terms of human memory alone. The entire liturgy is remembrance of Christ and in that act of remembrance, is the experience of the presence of Christ:

We know, finally, that in this sense the whole liturgy is a remembrance of Christ. It is all a sacrament and experience of his presence: of the Son of God, who came down from heaven and was incarnate that he might in himself lead us up to heaven. He “gathers us as the Church,” he transforms our gathering into an entrance and ascent, he “opens our mind’ to the hearing of his word, he, as “the offerer and the offered,” makes his offering ours and ours his, he fulfils our unity in his love, and, finally, through his thanksgiving, which has been granted to us, he leads us up to heaven, he opens to us access to his Father.\(^{183}\)

It is at the Last Supper that Christ offers the invitation for his disciples to remember him as Eucharistic; and because of him, we are able to perceive our entrance in him to the heavenly banquet. Christ is in our midst in and through his Parousia. Rooted in this anamnetic aspect is the imminent experience of the Risen Christ and the foretaste of the heavenly banquet. For Schmemann, this is precisely the notion conveyed in the anaphora prayers ascribed to St. John Chrysostom in which the whole of salvation history is summed up prior to the offering of the gifts and in which we acknowledge “…having in remembrance this saving commandment and all those things which have come to pass for

\(^{183}\) Schmemann, *The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom*, 199-200.
us; the cross, the tomb, your resurrection on the third day, your ascension into heaven and your second and glorious coming.” The church, in its Eucharistic consciousness as experienced in the liturgy of ascent to the new aeon, remembers in an act of love all that Christ has accomplished and will accomplish for the salvation of the world.

Schmemann’s Eucharistic vision is such that the very nature, the essence of the liturgy is to be the sacrament which manifests, celebrates, and enfolds all of creation into the kingdom of God through Christ in the Holy Spirit. No matter what the sacramental celebration, whether it be a baptism, wedding, anointing of the sick, or any act of the church in which Christ offers himself to the faithful, all sacraments—indeed all of life itself—finds its ultimate meaning in reference to the Kingdom which is to come. Schmemann comments that all sacramental celebrations, if not explicitly then implicitly, begin their liturgical celebration with the blessing of the Kingdom: “Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages, Amen.” This blessing of the Kingdom by the celebrant and the faithful reveals the “destination” of the church where the church finds her home and where all of the cosmos finds its home, in reference to the Kingdom. In Christ and the Holy Spirit, the church “ascends” to where her Lord is—the Kingdom of God. This is why Schmemann describes the liturgy as “the liturgy of ascent” because through the liturgy all of creation ascends to the Kingdom, revealing the truly eschatological nature of the Church. Through His ascension, Christ sits at right hand of his Father and in Christ humanity ascends to the Kingdom:

…the Eucharist is the sacrament of the beginning and the end, of the world and its fulfillment as the kingdom of God, then it is completed by the Church’s ascent to
heaven, to the “homeland of the heart’s desire,” the “status patriae”—the messianic banquet of Christ, in his kingdom. This means that all of this—the “assembly as the Church,” the ascent to the kingdom—is accomplished in and through the Holy Spirit. “Where the Church is, there is the Holy Spirit and the fullness of grace.” In these words of St. Irenaeus of Lyons is engraved the experience of the Church as the Sacrament of the Holy Spirit. For if where the Church is the Holy Spirit is also, then where the Holy Spirit is there is the renewal of creation, there we find the “beginning of another life, new and eternal,” the dawn of the mysterious, unfading day of the Kingdom of God.184

The Pneumatological and Eschatological Dimensions of the Eucharist

An understanding of Schmemann’s sacramental view of all reality and of the church herself as sacrament is of great assistance for understanding two other important dimensions of his Eucharistic theology: his view of the work of the Holy Spirit in the Eucharistic presence and his view of the Eucharist as eschatological. The pneumatological character of the ecclesial community as a participant in the new life of the Kingdom cannot be underestimated in the Eucharistic vision of Schmemann. Here again Schmemann maintains his holistic approach to Eucharistic theology, which he believes to be intrinsic to the very nature of any sound theology as it is reflected either in the Western or Eastern traditions. Pneumatology cannot be separated from Christology, or ecclesiology, as doing so would betray the natural interrelatedness of all the aspects of

184 Schmemann, The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom, 36.
the church’s life. It is noteworthy, for example, that in his work the *Eucharist*, Schmemann begins each chapter addressing the various aspects of the liturgy whether it be the synaxis, the proclamation of the Word, or any other aspect, in the same way: “The Sacrament of…” This approach demonstrates Schmemann’s holistic and broad view of sacrament.

One of the main tenets of Schmemann, in addressing the pneumatological nature of the liturgy, is his reflection on the epiclesis and the epicletic nature of all sacramental reality. By the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, the church gathers as the ecclesial body of Christ, and by the Spirit, all life is not only grounded in God and his kingdom, but also is renewed through the life-giving grace of the Spirit. Indicative of the epicletic character of Eastern Christian worship is the universal liturgical practice, in both the personal and the corporate prayer of the church, of the invocation of the Holy Spirit as the initial step from one with the face toward God: “O Heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, who art in all places and fills all things, Treasury of blessings and Giver of life, come and dwell within us, and cleanse us of every impurity, and save our souls, O Good One.” This prayer acknowledges and celebrates the Holy Spirit as the one who gives life and who is the witness to Jesus Christ as Messiah, Son of God and Savior of the world. And it is the Holy Spirit who, by filling all things with his presence, reveals to humanity our ultimate destiny and purpose—to live in communion with the Holy Trinity.

Noteworthy here, relative to this prayer to the Holy Spirit, is Schmemann’s emphasis on the Spirit as the one who “fills all things.” This “filling all things” becomes a linchpin for Schmemann in this sense: it is by and through the Holy Spirit—who, in eschatological terms, is the one who initiates the new time, the new aeon, the time of the
“eighth day” of Pentecost—that the Kingdom is to come. This eschatological aspect of the liturgy and Christ’s presence is crucial to Schmemann’s understanding of all things being permeated with the Holy Spirit and consequently, of the Eucharistic gifts which, when offered through the liturgy, are seen by the faithful as the body and blood of Christ. It is the Holy Spirit who reveals the truth, who sanctifies all of creation in the high priestly ministry of Jesus Christ of whom the Spirit bears witness. This pleroma of the Spirit will be seen most clearly in the context of the liturgy as having its origin not on earth at the will of humanity, but in the agapic gesture of God. Thus, the Eucharistic celebration is, on earth, a celebration already taking place in the heavenly realm, in the kingdom of God.

Schmemann’s emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit is behind his objection to the tendency to pinpoint the moment at which the elements are transformed. First, in a broad sense, Schmemann references the over-arching, all encompassing and sanctifying presence of the Spirit as the one who is sent, given to the world by the will of the Father and who rests in the Son. The church, by virtue of the Pentecostal event, now serves as the witness, the living testimonial of the presence and activity of the Spirit in the natural order of the cosmos and in the human condition. Working within this broader perspective, one is approaching the Holy in all-encompassing terms who accomplishes and reveals the sanctification of all life at all times. This is, after all, the nature of the Spirit as “giver of life.”

For Schmemann, one reality is certain to prove detrimental to the understanding of the epiclesis: the eventual limiting and narrowing of the understanding of the epiclesis through its being relegated to the construct of a consecratory formula based on a cause-
and-effect sacramental paradigm. The endless controversies over the manner of how the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ—when is the precise moment of the consecration of the gifts, whether it be through the “words of institution” or the moment of the “descent of the Holy Spirit,” i.e. the act of the epiclesis itself—these controversies, according to Schmemann, are born out of a system and worldview which is antithetical to the *lex orandi* of the church. The very fabric out of which these controversies arose and even the seeming resolutions proposed to resolve them, have at best nothing to do with Eucharistic presence and the Holy Spirit and, at worst, serve only to distort the joyful celebration of the Eucharist in which all creation receives the gift of the Holy Spirit. For Schmemann, the Holy Spirit transforms all things by filling all things with himself and reveals the presence of Christ, of whom the Spirit gives testimony.

It is true that Wybrew demonstrates that, very early in the East, an impulse developed to focus on the Eucharistic gifts and their “change” into the Body and Blood of Christ via a consecratory action:

First, there is a new way of speaking of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The Church of the first three centuries was clear that Christ was present in its celebration, as the active invisible celebrant. For Cyril he is present rather as the passive victim. Christians in the early centuries did not doubt that in Communion they received the Body and Blood of Christ, the bread of eternal life and the cup of everlasting salvation. But Cyril speaks of the consecration of the elements as bringing about a change of an almost chemical kind: he cites the changing of water into wine at Cana in Galilee as an example of the kind of change effected in
the Eucharist. The East anticipated the medieval Western doctrine of the real presence by many hundreds of years.¹⁸⁵

Wybrew, however, goes on to show that the pneumatological developments and dogmatic pronouncements on the Holy Spirit in the Council of Constantinople, 381 A.D., and the writings of Cyril of Jerusalem emphasize the work of the Holy Spirit in the Eucharistic banquet:

This change is brought about by the Holy Spirit. Cyril is quite clear that “whatsoever the Holy Spirit touches is sanctified and changed.” In the Eucharist this doctrine received expression in the invocation, or epiclesis, of the Holy Spirit in the Eucharistic prayer. If the epiclesis in Cyril’s prayer reflects a new theology of consecration, the intercession expresses a new understanding of the purpose of the consecration. The Holy Spirit is invoked to change the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ so that in the presence of the divine victim the Church may intercede for herself and the world, the living and the dead.¹⁸⁶

Wybrew maintains that the epiclesis of the Holy Spirit, in order to bring about a change of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, is now envisioned within the framework of sacrifice and intercession. Cyril’s treatment of the epiclesis tends toward its sanctifying purpose to bring about a change of the elements so that the faithful can,

¹⁸⁵ Wybrew, The Orthodox Liturgy, 34-34.
¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 35.
through the sacrificial victim in the person of Christ, offer prayers and intercessions of propitiation to God.

Another eventual development was a sense of fear in the presence of the Eucharist, which led to, among other things, the faithful receiving communion less often, based on the sense of unworthiness before the presence of the Divine. A further outcome of this development is that it became the privilege of the clergy to receive communion at every Eucharistic celebration while the laity’s participation was reduced to a minimum, thus furthering the rise of clericalism within the life of the Church.

Regarding the presence of Christ in the Eucharistic gifts, Schmemann maintains that any explanation of such a change, whether philosophical, scientific, or even theological, cannot be according to the logic or reason of the structure of “this world.” It is the Holy Spirit who, in an invisible manner, renews and transfigures all things and only in reference to the kingdom which is not of this world. The cause and effect notion and all formulae are ultimately deficient in their abilities to explain any change in the Eucharist. It is precisely the imperative of faith which makes such rational explanation impossible:

But this conversion remains invisible, for it is accomplished by the Holy Spirit, in the new time, and is certified only by faith. So also the conversion of the bread and wine into the holy body and blood of Christ is accomplished invisibly. Nothing perceptible happens — the bread remains bread, and the wine remains wine. For if it occurred “palpably,” then Christianity would be a magical cult and not a religion of faith, hope and love.
Thus any attempt to explain the conversion, to locate it in formulas and causes, is not only unnecessary but truly harmful. “I believe that this is truly Thine own most pure Body and that this is truly Thine own precious Blood…”

St. John Chrysostom, in referring to the Eucharistic gifts, stated in effect that, with the eyes of the body we see bread and wine; with the eyes of faith we see the Body and Blood of Christ. This is precisely why Schmemann maintains that it is necessary for the believer’s faith to be on the most personal of levels. This personal faith echoes the Eucharistic consciousness of the church as a believing community in the truth of the Body and Blood of Christ. The prayers of belief and faith are shaped by the Eucharistic experience and at the same time they reaffirm the foundational conviction of the ecclesial community as a whole as well as every member of the church on the most personal level.

Turning now to the eschatological dimension, we must note that Schmemann sees the epiclesis not only as the transformative work of the Holy Spirit, but also as his situating the church in the time of this world and, at the same time, inaugurating a new time, which is wrought by Christ as he embraces human history and the human condition. The liturgy is the all-encompassing act of God embracing humanity and the cosmic order

---


188 Schmemann, throughout his works in sacramental theology, points out that almost all of the prayers of the liturgy are prayed in the first person plural, whereas only the prayer before the reception of communion and the creed itself is prayed in the first person singular. This, for Schmemann, reflects the notion that every believer must state their personal belief, their personal conviction of faith, relative to the church’s creedal statements and the reality of the truth of the Eucharistic experience of receiving the very body and blood of Christ. Both of these are essential personal statements of faith.
in the newness of the Holy Spirit. The liturgy as ascent to the kingdom is central to Schmemann’s expression of the theological mindset of the Church. The day of the eschaton is brought to bear on the world when the Eucharist is celebrated; the bread and wine are offered to God, the Holy Spirit sanctifies all things; and none of this reality can be relegated to “this world” in the sense of its operations. This is why Schmemann states that, during the consecration—which he sees as the whole of the liturgical celebration and not as confined to one special moment—nothing “happens” to the bread and wine according to the constructs of this world. One is dealing here with another reality, and it is through the symbol that we participate in God and he relates to us. When all is taken by the Holy Spirit, all things are made new—a newness which is of God, and not of this world. The gifts, the people of God, the very cosmos are permeated with the Holy Spirit, and Christ fulfills all things, permeates all things so that all may become what it is meant to be by God. In his journals regarding his preparation in penning the chapter on the Holy Spirit in his work, The Eucharist, Schmemann shares his insights:

The first question is: When and how are the gifts consecrated. Many contradictory, insufficient and ambiguous interpretations exist—it started in the fourth century when the “moment” of the consecration began to be discussed. All of it appears to me as a theological failure—the reason for that failure is quite clear. The Eucharist can be interpreted correctly only in eschatological categories. Performed in time (not outside of time), the Liturgy reveals in time; anticipates and gives the Kingdom of the age to come; so that the Sacrament of
the Eucharist, although consisting of a series of actions, is one, undivided sacrament.\footnote{Julianna Schmemann, ed., \textit{The Journals}, 275.}

Schmemann’s mention of time at this juncture is crucial to his sacramental/Eucharistic theology for at least two reasons. First, Schmemann’s premise is that—unlike certain utopian spiritualities which seek humanity’s escape from time, in which time is seen as essentially a dead-end and trap—in the Eucharistic celebration, time is in and of itself assumed by Christ. Yes, time is fragmented and broken, a constant reminder of the finitude of all things. Yet, the kairotic time of God’s movement toward and embracing of the world is now experienced as time renewed and transfigured. Schmemann was vehemently opposed to any type of spirituality that denied the “very good” of creation. As discussed earlier, the world, by its very essence as being a creation of God, is sacrament. Christ was born and died \textit{in this world}—he came for the salvation of \textit{this world}, the world as it is. Consequently, the time of this world, because of the advent of Christ, is liturgical time, kairotic time, as celebrated in the Eucharist which is, in essence, the expectation and anticipation of the “Kingdom of the age to come.”

Second, Schmemann wants to correct any misunderstanding, which was and perhaps is still prevalent in some circles, that the Eucharist’s purpose is to celebrate humanity’s \textit{escape} from the time of this world into a utopian time. There is no utopian time, only the Kingdom of God. The Eucharist is not the celebration of our escape from this world, but is the very expression of this world, \textit{the sacrament}, in which the world is
celebrated as redeemed, transfigured, saved. If one is to encounter Christ’s presence, it not through an escape to another world or some world of “spirituality” but in the world as Eucharist:

While the liturgy as a whole is related to time, is part of time, inside the Liturgy the categories of time are not applicable, because the essence of the Liturgy is in leaving the fallen, fragmented time and moving into a time restored in all its fullness. In that sense, the whole Liturgy is in the Spirit. Christ is present; He assembles, offers and distributes through the Holy Spirit, as at the Last Supper. On the day of the Last Supper, there was no epiclesis, and the Last Supper shows the glorification of the Son by the Father and the Spirit, so that the distinction in the Eucharist of the actions of the three Persons of the Holy is wrong and leads to dead ends. Each person of the Holy is acting “Trinitarianly.”

The Church is “taken up” into the Kingdom; it proclaims and celebrates the Kingdom, and the Holy Spirit reveals the presence of Christ as the One in whom all creation finds its life and fulfillment. Schmemann’s articulation of the dynamic movement of the liturgy as preparation, celebration, and fulfillment is radically distanced from the difficulties of Eucharistic theology based, on the whole, within a framework of deductive reasoning. It is, for Schmemann, the categories of thought in which these attempts are made that are the stumbling blocks for a holistic, revelatory and relational Eucharistic theology based on ecclesial prayer and experience.

\[190\] Ibid., 274-275.
Schmemann’s insists on the eschatological nature of the liturgy as a liturgy of ascent, of passage:

Thanksgiving has taken us, the Church, up to heaven, to the heavenly altar. In heaven, there is no other Food, no other Drink, than God, who gives us, as our life, His Son. So bread and wine are transformed by our rising up in the Son to the Father. And the Holy Spirit reveals Him to us as perfect, full, complete – given to us as communion.

The goal of creation is fulfilled and revealed. What happens with the Bread? It is “fulfilled.” “This is My Body…” What does that mean? It means that it is what the Bread was meant to be: everlasting, existing before time, Divine, fulfilled. It joins us in Christ to God; it makes us into what we are created for. It means that in this world, in its categories, nothing happens to the bread because all that is happening is spiritual, in the Spirit. All the talk about the substance, the talks about the “moment,” does not clarify anything. But then, “blessed are you who see….” It is impossible to objectively fit the Kingdom of God into frames, laws, connections of this world. That is why the disciples did not recognize Christ “objectively” but knew that it was He—spiritually. The early Church, therefore, never mentions the Eucharist apart from the Church, the Assembly.¹⁹¹

The demise of the eschatological nature of the church, its inner life of hope, joy and expectation, has brought about a “watering down” of the Christian witness and of the

¹⁹¹Ibid., 275.
Pentecostal fervor of the early church, as well as its missionary imperative. Because of the rise and challenges of secular humanism and its influence in the life of the church, such a worldview has lent itself to an image of the church, the kingdom, as being a result of human efforts, even if divinely inspired to make this world a “better place.” From this perspective, the church loses its eschatological vantage point which, for Schmemann, is the only vantage point for an authentic expression of the ecclesia. To clarify his point relative to the meaning of the term eschatology, Schmemann states:

I am using it to denote the distinctive particularity of the Christian faith, which is first of all a system of beliefs – belief in God, belief in the saving nature of certain historical events, and finally belief in the ultimate victory of God in Christ and of the Kingdom of God. But at the same time as Christians we already possess that in which we believe. The Kingdom is still to come, and yet the Kingdom that is to come is already in the midst of us. The Kingdom is not only something promised, it is something of which we can taste here and now. And so in all our preaching we are bearing witness, martyria, not simply to our faith but to our possession of that in which we believe. …in reality the whole of the Christian theology is eschatological, and the entire experience of life likewise. It is the very essence of the Christian faith that we live in a kind of rhythm—leaving, abandoning, denying the world, and yet at the same time always returning to it; living in time by that which is beyond time; living by that which is to come, but which we already know and possess.\textsuperscript{192}

\textsuperscript{192} Fisch, ed., \textit{Liturgy and Tradition}, 94-95. During the last days of his life on this earth, Fr. Alexander offered a proverbial summary relative to his vision of God and life sharing it with his son-in-law Fr.
Schmemann’s theological vision serves as experiential verification and witness to what both the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches hold as the very fabric of their respective Eucharistic visions and practice. Schmemann’s insights will also prove helpful in the dialogue between the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches in this respect; for both traditions the Eucharist is the all-encompassing and defining source of the of the Paschal mystery lived out and experienced in the sacraments. Though the predominant Eucharistic discourse in the Catholic Church has, since the Middle Ages, centered on the True Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, this does not preclude for Catholics—as Chauvet has demonstrated—the more holistic approach of regarding the Eucharist as, also, True Symbol. The rich imagery of especially older Catholic texts from the Middle Ages also proclaims a belief in Schmemann’s idea of the sacramentality of all creation. That many Catholics, bogged down in the materialism of our time, need to be recalled to these sacred mysteries is indisputable, and Schmemann offers and antidote that is not in the least incompatible with either Catholic or Orthodox teaching. Schmemann’s notions of sacramentality also provide an admirable groundwork for Zizioulas’s ideas of the need for renewal in our understanding of the Eucharist as relational and as that which satisfies the need of the human person for a relationship with a Person, not a reified reality.

Thomas Hopko. In turn, Fr. Thomas offered Fr. Alexander’s convictions and insights in a sermon that he delivered at the Divine Liturgy celebrated at the funeral of Fr. Alexander on December 16, 1983, at the Three Hierarchs Chapel of St. Vladimir’s Seminary. Fr. Thomas recalls Fr. Alexander’s words: “When I die, you can write my in memoriam in one brief paragraph.’ He said, ‘You just have to say that my whole worldview, my whole life, could be summed up in one little sentence: two “nos” and one “yes,” and eschatology- two “nos,” one “yes,” and the Kingdom to come.” The two “nos” that Fr. Alexander is referring to are no to secularism, no to religion and yes to the Church and the Kingdom of God. See Thomas Hopko, ‘Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemann: Two ‘Nos’ and One ‘Yes,’” St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly, 28, no. 1 (1984): 45-48.
CHAPTER FOUR: JOHN D. ZIZIOULAS AND THE RELATIONAL
CHARACTER OF PERSONHOOD: IMPLICATIONS FOR AN UNDERSTANDING
OF EUCHARISTIC PRESENCE

John D. Zizioulas provides the third voice in this dialogue with his groundbreaking work in the theology of personhood, complementing the insights of Chauvet and Schmemann and serving as a unique synthesizing voice. Whether we consider the relational imperative of Chauvet in light of the sacramental/symbolic order as the existential ground for our relationship with the “Other,” or Schmemann’s holistic view of the Eucharist, in which the human relates to God and to creation through the incarnate Christ within the Body of the Church and its sacramental life, the theme of relationality remains crucial to each of their respective theologies. Anthropologically speaking, humans are relational by nature and, in specifically Christian terms, this constituent aspect of the human finds its ultimate purpose and meaning in the mystery of the relationality of God. Hence, personhood becomes the foundational and axial principle which serves as both the genesis and goal in the theology of Zizioulas.

Whereas Chauvet and Schmemann, theologically speaking, reject that which defines, objectivizes, and categorizes the Eucharistic gifts, Zizioulas complements their thought by rejecting such methods in approaching the human person. He draws on Trinitarian theology to present man, the creature, as a relational being, and this understanding overshadows and informs Zizioulas’s thought on the Eucharistic
presence. He proposes that the issue of *relationality* is central to the ontology of the human person. Zizioulas’s reading of the Cappadocian fathers—Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa—is crucial to his theology of personhood because these fathers, in particular, understood *person* as an hypostasis created in the image of the Trinitarian God. This chapter will focus on and explore a few key select concepts as presented by Zizioulas regarding the notions of communion and personhood, and will demonstrate the applicability of these notions to the larger context of Eucharistic presence and celebration.

For Zizioulas, the concept of Eucharistic presence must be situated within the dialogue of the human person in relationship to God, the self, fellow humans, and nature. To demonstrate the applicability of Zizioulas’s thought regarding relationality as constituting the church’s “Eucharistic consciousness,” we must distance ourselves from any substantialistic ontological base. In other words, we must lay aside the notion of a static and definitive presence. According to Zizioulas, there can be no presence outside the realm of inter-personal presence. The Eucharistic presence is not simply a sort of psychological presence, or a strictly material one; rather, it resides in a holistic framework of relationality, which serves as the basis and grounding of Zizioulas’s work.

In developing his work on the human person, Zizioulas begins with the Trinity, with the Patristic notion of *perichoresis,* which is understood as the *relational* dynamic

---

193 Zizioulas’s works include *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church,* *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church,* and *Lectures In Christian Dogmatics,* as well as numerous other publications.

of life shared among the three persons of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Starting with the *arche* of the Father as the principal source within the Godhead, Zizioulas maintains that in Patristic theology, the source of the Godhead is not an abstract principle of substance but a relational person, the Father. In other words, God “exists” in relationality as “union” among the Three Persons. The Father is the *arche* of the Godhead, begetting the Son, and it is the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and reveals the Son. The mutuality of the persons of the Trinity is a linchpin in the thought of Zizioulas.

In both his work on the Trinity and on the human person, Zizioulas confronts the question of the notion of “being” and proposes a description of the nature of the human person within the context of a Christian theology of personhood. Citing the limitations of the Hellenistic philosophical traditions as one example, Zizioulas maintains that, under the aforementioned philosophical and cultural constructs, the concept of “being,” and consequently what is means to “be” human, is reduced to the notion of a person understood as an *individual ontology of substance*. These paradigms, according to Zizioulas, are essentially static in nature as opposed to the dynamism of growth and of becoming which are constitutive of human nature.

The limitations of such a construct present the notion of man as an entity subject to and operating within a closed ontological system. Therefore, the human person is subject to finitude, necessity, and contingency based on a purely operative biological level of being, which, Zizioulas believes, is indeed the plight of the person who is
divorced from the life of God. Crucial for Zizioulas is that humanity is now faced, in light of the incarnate and risen Christ, with the challenge of recognizing the inherent limitations of humanity’s biological existence and is subsequently called to be open and receptive to the redemptive work of Christ. Participation in this work, however, does not serve as an escape from the human condition, but as a transformative power that illuminates and recreates creation itself. In Christ, through the life of his ecclesia, humans are now invited to be open to the regenerative “divine genetic” (phrase mine), constitutive of the ontological nature of every human as created by God. The remedy for the aforementioned closed and fettering construct of biological existence is, for Zizioulas, the salvific message of Jesus Christ and one’s baptism into him and his ecclesia, thus opening up a new possibility for the emergence of the truest and most authentic life which is, in the most real sense, characteristic of every human being as truly human, the person restored to wholeness, the ecclesial being.

For Zizioulas, human nature is restored to its wholeness in the incarnation, when the Son of God assumes it and encompasses it in his own person. Then in the Body of Christ human persons are united with him in a nexus of interrelatedness. In this saving communion event, the human nature as a whole is shared by all who are united with him. This heals the fragmentation of human nature so that in Christ it becomes the milieu in which the interrelatedness of human person can take place, thus constituting the true identity of each. Although Zizioulas does not emphasize it, this means that human nature is itself transformed from a cause of division among persons to a cause of unity. Each is called to attain the likeness of Christ, to become both Christ and the Church in the event of the Eucharist, and
thus to fulfill the vocation of encompassing the whole of human nature in a uniquely personal way. However, this is only achieved definitively in the eschaton.\(^{195}\)

Zizioulas also rejects the Hellenistic philosophical mindset that subjugates the ultimate destiny of humanity, the cosmos and even the gods, as poignantly exemplified in Homer, to “fate.” Rather, the powerful message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the gospel of life, opens up the possibility for a most authentic notion of personhood grounded in \textit{freedom} of life as it is lived in God. This new message of the gospel, according to Zizioulas, confronted the world with a fundamental and radical shift in the understanding of the human person. The gospel message liberated the human from being categorized and perceived as a mere “object,” and transmuted the concept of person to that of dynamic freedom, of the person as “subject.” The subjective “I,” as person, is now rooted in a union of relationality, a “face-to-face” encounter with the “Other,” the transcendent God, who opens up an existential horizon for mutual recognition and hence authentic personhood. Furthermore, the human finds true personhood only in \textit{relation} to God and one’s fellow members, especially within the salvific mystery of the ecclesial community.

In this light, we can also consider the stark realities of what Zizioulas refers to as *radical individualism*, understood as the ultimate empowered “I,” as well as the phenomenon of the *objectification of the human person*. Both of these principles are obvious in the social and psychological constructs of our contemporary world. These two notions of individualism and objectification are symptoms of a convolution of psychological and societal milieus that, for Zizioulas, prove ultimately negative for humanity. Indeed, these two prevailing forces represent the very antithesis of what it means to be human and betray the integrative ontological base of authentic humanity, revealing the existential isolationism of the human person. Humans, as beings created in the image of God, have become detached from God, from each other as relational beings, and even from themselves. Such an ontological “disconnect” leads to a compromised, if not purely negative, view of the human person especially with regard to the worth of every human. No person or societal structure possesses the license to determine what it means to be human. Contemporary ideologies of personhood are many times left unchallenged and even naively and uncritically accepted as truth. Zizioulas attempts to face these questions squarely and to formulate a number of responses by way of a description of personhood, rather than a definition.

We will also consider Zizioulas’s proposal of the concept of the ecclesial, or “catholic person,” described as the person who has been liberated from the confines of radical individualism, self-definition, ultimate isolation, and death, all realities indicative of our biological existence. Zizioulas points out that there are two “modes” of human existence according to patristic theology:
Patristic theology considers the person to be an “image and likeness of God.” It is not satisfied with a humanistic interpretation of the person. From this standpoint, patristic theology sees man in light of two “modes” of existence.” One may be called the *hypostasis of biological existence*, the other the *hypostasis of ecclesial existence*.\(^{196}\)

Zizioulas maintains that, through the mystery of being baptized into Christ and his body, the church, true life lived in communion with the Trinity is inaugurated. Baptism moves us from “biological existence” to “ecclesial existence;” from the death dealing and finite biological life of this world, to life of the *ecclesia*.\(^{197}\) This “catholic person,” or “whole” person, is integrated into the life of *theosis*: participation in the life of God by the grace of the Holy Spirit and the incarnate Christ. The Eucharist is that ground in and through which the relationality between God and humankind is sealed in an ecstasy of mutual offering and love.

Within the context of Eucharistic presence, Zizioulas’ notion of relationality is axiomatic to an experiential understanding of such presence. Relationality, envisaged as the three persons of the Trinity sharing life as *perichoresis*, is the direct antithesis of the “modes” of Eucharistic presence which have been, throughout history, reduced to an


\(^{197}\) Zizioulas maintains that the three notions of the ”body” as: the risen body of the Christ, the ecclesial body of the church, and the eucharistic body as broken bread and wine distributed, were used interchangeably by St. Paul and the earliest patristic writers. The notion of the “body of Christ” initially was not understood as necessarily being viewed as three distinct separated entities devoid of any relationship among them. Over time, these three understandings of the “body” became viewed as distinct and separate realities thus compromising their intrinsic inter-relatedness.
instrumental means of sanctification for the individual believer. This understanding can ultimately serve as a divisive component within the intended communal experience of the Eucharistic celebration as a reciprocity of presence.

In order to defend his position against radical individualism—which, for Zizioulas, is ultimately a result of the human condition under the sway of sin—Zizioulas maintains that the Cappadocian Fathers, if not explicitly then implicitly, differentiated the notion of person from that of the individual. Zizioulas maintains a firm stance that true and authentic personhood can be realized only in the salvific event of Jesus Christ to which all of humanity ultimately aspires.

Trinitarian Life as Relationship: The Trinitarian Ontology of Personhood

Zizioulas’s theology is characterized by his indebtedness and fidelity to the anthropological vision of the Patristic East. A return or rediscovery of the Eastern Patristic anthropological tradition is, according to Zizioulas, essential for recovering the understanding of the human person as a being whose identity reflects the archetype of Trinitarian relational ontology. For Zizioulas, all theology must be anchored in and expressive of the revelation of the mystery of the Trinity as experienced in the Eucharistic life of the Church. This experience of the Trinitarian God is the source and goal of all theological enterprise. Indeed, some thinkers have proposed that the Eastern theological tradition rests on this maxim: start with the Trinity and go from there! And it is the hallmark of Eastern Patristic theology that the Trinitarian life is none other than the personal relationship rooted in the dogmatic truth of the Father as the aitia of the Trinity in a divine movement of agape, koinonia, and freedom.
Zizioulas contends that the concept of the person as a *relational* being trumps the substantialistic understanding of the essence of Trinitarian life and consequently, the life of the human person. Neither the Trinity nor the human is to be understood in substantialistic terms, as was evidenced earlier in this chapter. A distinctive attribute of Eastern Trinitarian theology, most emphatically evidenced in the writings of the Cappadocians, is the dogmatic affirmation of the Father as the principle source of the Trinity, which remains the linchpin in any proper understanding of relational ontology. The Father can be understood and experienced only in *personal/relational* terms both in the mystery of the Trinitarian life (immanent) among the three persons and in the Father’s will to share his life freely with humanity (economic) and to grace the cosmos with his presence: “God, as Father and not as substance, perpetually confirms through ‘being’ His free will to exist. And it is precisely His Trinitarian existence that constitutes this confirmation: the Father out of love—that is, freely—begets the Son and brings forth the Spirit.” With these words, Zizioulas shows that *persona* trumps *substantia*, and maintains that it is further by divine grace, initiation, and love of God that humans participate in the divine life as a force that forges interpersonal relationships, most especially in the life of the *ecclesia*.

The idea of *perichoresis*, (permeation/mutual indwelling, *circumincessio*) understood as expressing a relational ontology, underscores the attempt, especially in the spirit of the Cappadocian Fathers, to maintain the integrity of the hypostatic principle of the personhood of each of the Persons of the Trinity. The relationship among the Three

198 Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 41.
is underscored by the divine union or communion among them as well as the uniqueness and distinct identity of each Person. And, most important, the relationship among the Three Persons expresses the mystery of the divine life as a “person -within-person” encounter within the Trinitarian koinonia. Zizioulas observes that “God has no ontological content, no true being apart from communion.”\textsuperscript{199}

In examining the implications of \textit{perichoresis} as an operative principle in formulating a proper ontology of personhood based on Trinitarian life, Zizioulas offers the following insights:

The three persons inhere in one another, so each is found entirely within the other. Each person has his own ontological integrity, and yet they are one. In a letter attributed to Saint Basil we read: “Whatever the Father is, is also found in the Son and whatever the Son is, is also found in the Father in his entirety within him. Thus, the hypostasis of the Son is the image and likeness by which the Father can be known and the hypostasis of the Father is known in the image of the Son.”

The intention here is to set out the teaching of the Fourth Gospel that ‘Whomsoever has seen me, has seen the Father, for I am in the Father and the Father is in me.’ (John 14:11). In seeing the Son we see the Father, for the Father is fully present in the Son. The divine substance cannot be broken up; each person possesses the whole being of God. “God is not partitioned,” as Saint Gregory Nazianzus put it. The divine being is found in full in persons who are distinct from one another, so each person exists within the other persons. We

\textsuperscript{199} Zizioulas, \textit{Being as Communion}, 19.
could call this a mystery and refuse to [explore it] any further, but, as with the whole mystery of God, we must attempt to shed light on this too.200

The divine union, *henosis*, is characterized by a mutuality of recognition within the life of the Trinity which has its source in the life, will, and love of the Father. It is important to understand, as the Cappadocians did, that the source of God’s being is the Father—a Person rather than a substance. In writing about Zizioulas’s theology, Melissaris observes, “If God’s being is not caused by a Person, it is not a free being. And if this Person is not the Father alone, it is impossible to maintain the divine unity or oneness without taking resort to the ultimacy of substance in ontology, i.e. without subjecting freedom to necessity and Person to substance.”201

The subjugation of freedom to necessity relegates a person to the ontological structure of “being” and subsequent to this categorization, one is faced once again with the problematic of “person” understood within the framework of “substance.” It is these two fundamental difficulties, among others, which Zizioulas sees as stumbling blocks to a fully credible understanding of the human person as created in the image of a Trinitarian God. In addition, Zizioulas invokes the analogical imagery of humanity and the person-to-person existential reality as being a creaturely reflection of the relational character of God.


From the Cappadocian Fathers, Zizioulas also derives his rejection of the predicament of individualism so characteristic of modern man. The theological conviction is that God is indeed three persons, each person unique in “individuality” but not divisible and surely not an “individual” in the limited and limiting sense of the word. Individuality, in the most proper sense, refers to the uniqueness and full integrity of each Person of the Trinity. Each Person shares the divine nature, not in a substantialistic sense, but in the ultimacy of personhood. This unitive dynamic, perichoresis, exists because there is one God: one Father, the Son being begotten of the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father, as is clearly testified in the Scriptures and the creedal confessions of the Church. The Persons of the Trinity are not subject to the categories of divisibility and finitude, as these categories are constructs of the created order and, furthermore, are beyond the grasp of human reason and intelligence. Humans, on the other hand, as creatures created by God ex nihilo, exist (since the Fall) and are conditioned by the structures of temporality, divisibility, and finitude, with the reality of death bearing witness to our divisibility, dissolution, and finitude. Through the grace of

202 The Orthodox theologian Vladimir Lossky cites St. Gregory Nazianzen’s oration on baptism as a testimony to the mystery of the Trinitarian God and the inability of the human mind to grasp the inner life of God, let alone to subject the Trinitarian mystery to the categories of human constructs. St Gregory says the following regarding his reflections on God: “No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illumined by the splendour of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish them than I am carried back to the One. When I think of any One of the Three, I think of Him as the whole, and my eyes are filled, and the greater part of what I am thinking of escapes me. I cannot grasp the greatness of that One so as to attribute a greater greatness to the rest. When I contemplate the Three together, I see but one torch, and cannot divide or measure out the undivided light.” Vladimir Lossky, The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002), 46.
God, however, we are able to participate in the inner divine life of the Trinity, which is
gifted to us by God through his infinite love.203

The Trinitarian God is of one nature in three persons; therefore, the concept of a
unitive principle is not the defining factor in the Trinitarian relationship understood as
perichoresis, that is, how the three persons relate to each other.204 This “how” in terms of
relationship is maintained on the level of person and not on a level of idea or abstraction:
The Eastern view of selfhood inspired by the Trinitarian doctrine of perichoresis
or Mutual Interpenetration of the Divine Hypostasis stresses eucharistic
(communal) personal existence, the term “personal” affirming that persons are
“distinct but not separate,” that is, they are in unity with other persons. To the
contrary, the individualism, so prominent in Western theology and culture, in that
is “presupposes separation and division,” is a distortion of the nature of human

203 It is important to point out here, however, that Zizioulas is not saying that the concept of relationship as
communion is the primary unitive principle, either within the Trinitarian life or in human life. The
ontological reality of personhood precedes relationality; the dynamic of relationality is expressive of
personhood, not the other way around: relationality does not define the person, the person as person defines
relationality, and as such the emphasis is on the ultimacy of the person in relationship with the other.

204 The theological concept of perichoresis is a notion which has emerged as an operative theological
concept which runs throughout Eastern Christian thought. It has been noted by Paul Cumin in his article,
“Looking for Personal Space in the Theology of John Zizioulas,” referenced in this chapter, that Zizioulas
has been wrongly associated with the “perichoretic” notion as it has been presented and popularized in
contemporary theology. The author of this dissertation would concur with Cumin’s observation as tenable
if Cumin is referring to an extant treatment of perichoresis by Zizioulas in any definitive systematic
fashion. If Zizioulas’ treatment of perichoresis is not explicit, this author would contend that it is implicit
in Zizioulas’ theology of a Trinitarian personalist ontology as being the essential meaning of the
perichoretic nature of the mystery of the life of the Trinity which is crucial to a sound Trinitarian and
anthropological theology. Perichoresis indicates a manner of relationship among the persons of the Trinity
and has implications for ecclesiology and therefore Eucharistic theology as will be demonstrated later in
this dissertation.
existence based on a misunderstanding of the Divine Mystery of the “One and the Many.”\textsuperscript{205}

Zizioulas maintains that any ontology which is not rooted in the divine life of God the Father as \textit{koinonia} with the Son and the Holy Spirit will ultimately prove to be a false ontology.\textsuperscript{206} Once again, the notion of “relationship,” as well as the notion of “being” were placed on a radically new terrain and trajectory through the incarnation of Christ. According to Zizioulas, it was the Cappadocian Fathers who helped chart a new course in the discovery of the Christian notion of being as it can only be understood as related to a particular person, an hypostasis:

The being of God is a relational being: without the concept of communion it would not be possible to speak of the being of God. It would be unspeakable to speak of the “one God” before speaking of the God who is “communion,” that is to say, of the Holy Trinity. The Holy Trinity is a \textit{primordial} ontological concept and not a notion which is added to the divine substance…God has no ontological content, no true being, apart from communion.\textsuperscript{207}

It is through Christ, and his ecclesial body and in particular in the Eucharistic celebration, that humanity is able to participate in the \textit{koinonia} of the Holy Trinity. The \textit{theanthropos}, Jesus Christ, in his ascension to the heavens and His place of glory and the right hand of

\textsuperscript{205} Melissaris, “The Challenge,” 480.

\textsuperscript{206} Zizioulas, \textit{Being as Communion}, 15-19.

\textsuperscript{207} Ibid., 19.
his God and Father, elevates the dignity and integrity of every person who is called to participate in the feast of the Kingdom. We now turn to Zizioulas’s thought on the human person as derived from his Trinitarian theology.

Human Personhood: Created in God’s Image

The ancient Greek philosophers attempted to plumb the depths of what it meant to speak of the “essence of a thing,” and the idea of “being.” However, in attempting to formulate a concept of “person” within the philosophical tradition of the Greeks, based at least on Aristotelian and Platonic notions, this task proved untenable:

Although “prosopon” (person) exists as a term in ancient Greek thought, it is not associated with permanence. Ancient Greek thought in its essence is “a-personal.” In its Platonic variation, everything concrete and “individual” is ultimately referred to the abstract idea which constitutes its ground and final justification. In Platonic thought the person is an ontologically impossible concept, because the soul through reincarnation, by which it can return to life in a different being, is not permanently connected with one specific “individual.” According to Aristotle, the idea of the person is ontologically impossible, precisely because “a man is a concrete individuality” but only endures for as long as his psychosomatic union endures – death dissolves the concrete “individuality” completely and “definitively.” Thus the soul’s return to the world of ideas and its absorption by that world, as well as the elimination of the body, as Platonism teaches, and the breakdown of the psychosomatic composition by death, which
characterizes Aristotelianism, creates monstrous problems for the ontology of the person. The person as a hypostasis is impossible in ancient philosophy.\textsuperscript{208}

In addition, either notion of the person was categorized as a substantial entity defined within the order of a metaphysical construct which, for Zizioulas, betrays the vision of the Eastern and Western Fathers.

The Hebraic and Christian understandings of the human person are rooted in the foundational Biblical truth that humanity is created “in the image and likeness of God.”\textsuperscript{209}

As such, persons reflect, on a creaturely level, certain attributes or characteristics of God which are rooted in the Adamic nature of humanity. Zizioulas raises several questions: what, first of all, is unique about the Christian understanding of the “being” of relational persons, compared to the Hellenistic notion? How is “being,” understood in the Aristotelian and Platonic sense as a contingent reality based on a prior cause, relative to the Christian view of personhood?\textsuperscript{210} Within this framework of inquiry, Zizioulas brings to the dialogue that which he describes as the creative and liberating message of the Patristic writers. The Patristic writers, most notably the Cappadocian Fathers,

\textsuperscript{208} Metropolitan of Nafpaktos Hierotheos, \textit{The Person in the Orthodox Tradition}, trans. Esther Williams (Levadia-Hellas: Birth of the Theotokos Monastery, 1999), 117-118.

\textsuperscript{209} Some theologians, particularly of the Eastern tradition, cite a distinction between the “image” and “likeness” of God relative to the human being. The distinction is for some the following; that while humans are created in the image of God, the likeness of God is reflective of the process of \textit{theosis}, or divinization, which includes the notion of the exercise of human freedom within the arena of Christian growth in communion with God made possible by the invitation of the grace of God. In other words, it is one thing to acknowledge that each and every human is the image of God; it is quite another thing to speak of whether a person reflects the “likeness” of God. For an in-depth presentation on the notions of image and likeness, cf. Vladimir Lossky, \textit{The Image and Likeness of God}, ed. John H. Erickson and Thomas E. Bird (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press), 1974.

\textsuperscript{210} Zizioulas, \textit{Being as Communion}, 27-49.
eventually offered a new dimension to the ontological presuppositions of “being” characterized by Greek philosophy. Though we cannot here explore the various ontological schemes, theories, and questions arising from the dialectic of the ontology of the person per se, we will attempt to isolate some high points of Zizioulas’s thought regarding the ontology of the human person, as founded primarily on the principle of relationality and relative to the Eucharistic presence.

Zizioulas maintains that the Greek philosophical tradition was occupied primarily with the notion of being in terms of a metaphysical construct and philosophical speculation.211 For Zizioulas, the notion of personhood cannot be rooted in anything other than the revelation of Trinitarian life. The monistic worldview of the Greek philosophers proved to be a major limiting factor, resulting in an existential opacity of the notion of the human person as an entity existing in relation to the necessity of the cosmos.

The Greeks also wrestled with the notion of being as being, and notions of particularity and generality, and how and if the particular reflects the general. Along these same lines, the question of whether the general precedes the particular and is indeed the cause of those things which are designated as particulars, and the relationship among the particulars and the general was formed within the paradoxical notion of the “one and the many.” According to Zizioulas, in light of this construct, the ability of the Greeks to develop a personal ontology would be impossible:

The ontology of the classical Greeks made a personal ontology impossible…the truth of any particular thing was removed from its particularity and placed on the

211 Ibid., 39.
level of a universal form in which the particular participated: the thing itself passes away but its form *shared by more than one particular thing* survives. The survival of man was also subjected to the same principle. The Platonic soul of a human being, far from safeguarding the survival of the particular eternally, could be reincarnated in other things, even in animals. And Aristotle’s concern with the particular did not lead to the survival of the concrete being forever, except in the form of its species.²¹²

Thus, this impossibility of developing or identifying a personal ontology within the ancient Greek philosophical tradition set the stage for a revolution in the notion of ontology when Hellenistic philosophy was confronted with the Christian gospel, proclaiming the Trinitarian faith in One God in Three Persons. It became the task of the Patristic writers of the Church to re-interpret traditional philosophical terminology and constructs in *light of the Trinitarian notion of relationship*:

The Fathers, inspired from what was offered in original form in Scripture… made their revolution by removing the category of the hypostasis from the general, impersonal substance, and attaching it to the partial and particular person, so that it was now the person, not substance (or its surrogates, e.g., the *cosmos*) which claimed ontological ultimacy. This is how personhood was endowed with ontological content. In more specific terms, *hypostasis*, previously identified with substance, including divine substance, was now attached to the Trinitarian

---

persons, whose distinctiveness was elevated to the point of a previously unheard of, and even blasphemous, ontological ultimacy. Most significant of all is the fact that what now mattered was the freedom exercised by each Trinitarian Person to be unique from the other two, and yet remain in relation with them. Thus, “communion does not threaten otherness,” Zizioulas concludes; “it generates it.” Moreover, a study of Trinitarian theology teaches us that “otherness” is constitutive of unity, and not consequent upon it, since the Eastern Fathers made their starting-point the Persons rather than the divine substance common to all Three of them.  

Within the Patristic tradition, Zizioulas believes, the incorporation and interpretation of key terms, such as ousia, hypostasis, and prosopon, as employed within the Christian context contain and reflect an existential and relational base. Herein lies the tragedy of the human condition which finds itself anchored and existing not in the freedom of the Trinitarian life as agapic koinonia but bound and fettered within the boundaries of necessity characterized by finitude and destruction. It is precisely the message of the freedom of a personal God of love, offered in Jesus Christ, that shatters the bonds of necessity and opens up for humanity and the cosmos a new possibility, the possibility of true life. This true life is lived and realized within the ecclesia as communion/Eucharist, a notion which will be developed in more detail later in this chapter.

---

Among the notions of the person found in modern Western philosophy and some schools of theology, Zizioulas addresses the notion of the person, the *individuum*, as an autonomous being, which one might find, for example, in Kantian moral philosophy. Zizioulas maintains that

with the help of a cross-fertilization between the Boethian and the Augustinian approaches to man, our Western philosophy and culture have formed a concept of man out of a combination of two basic components: *rational individuality* on the one hand, and *psychological experience and consciousness on the other*. It was on the basis of this combination that western thought arrived at the conception of the person as an *individual* and/or *personality*, that is, a unit endowed with intellectual, psychological and moral qualities centered on the axis of consciousness. Man’s distinctive characteristic became in this way identical with his ability to be conscious of himself and of others and thus to be an *autonomous self* who intends, thinks, decides, acts and produces results.

Attempts at making out of the Aristotelian adjective “rational” a *substantial* qualification of man (e.g., by explaining the uniqueness of man in terms of his “mind,” “consciousness,” etc.) cannot be seriously regarded as having demonstrated that there is something radically, and not simply by way of degree, different between man and the rest of the animals, “the difference in mind between man and the higher animals’ being….”

---

214 Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 210-211.
The Human Person: Ekstasis and Hypostasis

For Zizioulas, the attempt to define the notion of the person eludes any concrete expression because of “…the fact that the entire problem of human capacity and incapacity rises precisely from man’s resistance to any such ‘substantial’ definition.” The resistance of man against allowing himself to be reduced to the category of “being” bespeaks, perhaps, the inherent transcendent character of the human as a creature of God who is, by nature, designed for a relationship with God that transcends the limited capacities of the human condition under the restraints of sin. This reciprocal movement between God and humanity is realized in true freedom and love; it is a dynamic of the reciprocity of life which is open-ended, mutually given freely and abundantly by the grace of the Holy Spirit:

Viewed from this perspective of ontological absoluteness, each person is considered to be a unique, unrepeatable, and inexhaustible being, one that might not be made to fit the a priori theories and definitions of any system, but may only be known (and never exhaustively, at that) through the immediacy of communion and love. Thus, the Cappadocian Fathers gave to the world the most precious concept it possesses: the concept of the person, as an ontological concept in the ultimate sense, resistant to ousianic reduction and reification that are suggested by scientific, mechanistic materialism. “In stark contrast to the Scholastic attempt for objectivity, the Greek East, by perceiving God’s image in man, struggled to protect the mystery of the divine and human modes of existence

215 Ibid., 212.
from objective, cerebral formulations,” writes the Greek theologian Christos Yannaras in his monumental work *Person and Eros*...Despite the differences among the Scholastic, Rationalist, and Empirical epistemology...the common denominator behind them all consists in the tendency to subject all reality, including inner life and psychology, to quantitative tests and measurements, to demand an utter objectivity.\(^{216}\)

In attempting to provide a theological construct that adequately reflects a proper patristic anthropology, Zizioulas employs a set of descriptors of what it means, in the Christian sense, to be a “person.” Zizioulas offers two key terms which he believes express the constitutive and fundamental attributes of personhood: *ekstasis* and hypostasis. In formulating his description of the human person, as we have already seen, Zizioulas begins with the Trinity, and of chief importance here is his explication of the ecstatic and hypostatic nature of the human person seen through the lens of dynamic relationality.

With God, each person of God is the entire being, not a portion of the being of God. But God has no beginning and no mortality, and his being is not divisible. In God, the existence of the one person within the others actually creates a particularity, an “individuality” and an otherness. Because we are made in the image of God we can see imitations of this in our own relationships. Because man is made in the image of God, we can find analogies between God and man

\(^{216}\) Melissaris, “The Challenge,” 482.
that are based in the relationships of the persons of God. The doctrine of the Trinity gives us the truth of our own existence.217

Zizioulas focuses on the ecstatic nature of the human in this sense: the human is created in and lives in the process of theosis in and through Christ who has redeemed humanity and the cosmos. Since every human is created in the image of God, who is relational by nature, relationality is constitutive of every person—within every person is the imperative to transcend the limitations of the self, burdened by the inflated and fallen ego; to engage the “other” not on purely social or psychological grounds but in totality, in and through Christ and the ecclesia. There exists an existential yearning within each person to find the “self” not within the closed loop of the search for personal enlightenment or of the discovery of the self as individuum, but as the persona, experiencing growth from “glory to glory” in the Holy Spirit, immersed in the profundity of Divine Life as Eternal Life:

Man’s personhood should not be understood in terms of “personality,” that is, of a complex of natural, psychological or moral qualities which are in some sense “possessed” by or “contained” in the human individuum. On the contrary, being a person is basically different from being an individual or “personality” in that the person cannot be conceived in itself as a static entity, but only as it relates to. Thus, personhood implies the “openness of being,” and even more than that, the

217 Zizioulas, Lectures in Christian Dogmatics, 64.
ek-stasis of being, that is, a movement towards communion which leads to a transcendence of the boundaries of the “self” and thus to freedom.218

In describing the “ecstatic” as that which is constitutive of personhood, Zizioulas’ emphasis on the reality of, or better yet, the gift of freedom is key. What is existentially experienced in the liberating power of Christ’s redemptive life in and through the ecclesia proves to be the remedying force in the re-shaping and transfiguration of the person who is perplexed and bound by the constraints of the focus on the self. One is not simply speaking here of some sort of narcissism in the psychological sense, but a true alienation of the self from the self, from God, fellow humans, and the cosmos. For Zizioulas, the tragedy of the self, as understood in this limiting manner, is evidenced in the radical individualism of the person as the one “turned inward on one’s self” to the point of a true loss of the real sense of the person as ecstatic being.219 Like all realities posited and operative within the complexity of the prison of alienation, the person, in this respect, can become an end, in and of itself, which is the very antithesis of personhood as revealed in the dynamic perichoresis within Trinitarian life:

Starting from the distinctiveness of the Trinitarian Persons…from the divine substance, eastern patristic thought saw human beings primarily as relational,

218 Zizioulas, Communion and Otherness, 212.
219 Ibid., 213.
ecstatic entities, whose true nature is fully completed and blossoms in communion and fellowship with one another.\textsuperscript{220}

It is in the denial of the self, according to Melissarias’ understanding of Zizioulas’s position, that the “true self” emerges as is evidenced by the spiritual tradition of the Church based on Jesus’s injunction for such denial. To deny one’s self does not in any way imply a negation of personhood, but rather elevates the nature of personhood to its highest dignity as created in the image of God and a participant in the Trinitarian life. Once again, Zizioulas emphasizes the critical difference between the selfish individual as opposed to the ecstatic person, the latter reflective of a sound ontology of personhood rooted within the Patristic tradition. From such a perspective, humanity can be liberated from the confines of determinism so characteristic of a world governed by the laws of nature—that is, necessity.

In exploring Zizioulas’s notion of hypostasis, we must remember that for Zizioulas, the notion of “person” or that of “human nature” on its own simply does not exist in any ontological or meaningful way. The concept of the human person is quite meaningless, or at least radically compromised, outside of the life of the Trinitarian God. For Zizioulas, there can be no such reality as a generic person or a general basic ontological entity called humanity that is unrelated existentially toward and in God. These notions of person/humanity,\textsuperscript{221} in and of themselves, when divorced from their

\textsuperscript{220} Melissaris, “The Challenge,” 478.

\textsuperscript{221} Cf. Zizioulas, \textit{Being as Communion}, 17.
Trinitarian-life context, are relegated to an abyss of meaninglessness in that the essential meaning of each of these concepts, at least in the Christian sense, reaches its full integrity and depth of meaning only when understood and experienced within the dynamic of *divine relationality*.

Consider the paradoxical and perhaps even ironic similarities between Zizioulas’ thinking on this matter and that of atheistic existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre. For Sartre, human essence or nature does not exist as the inherited anthropological “given” of what it means to be human; humans simply exist and ultimately create their essence, or essential selves, as all humans confront and are confronted by themselves, others, and the world in which they live. Humans are simply posited within the world as it is, and it is up to the human to create his world-of-being or its essence.

Atheistic existentialism, of which I am a representative, declares with greater consistency that if God does not exist there is at least one being whose existence comes before its essence, a being which exists before it can be defined by any conception of it. The being is man or, as Heidegger has it, the human reality.

What do we mean by saying existence precedes essence? We mean that man first

---

222 In describing the existential approach of Zizioulas as an operative philosophical/theological method employed in his theology, it should be noted that one of the criticisms lodged against him is that his thought is highly influenced by modern existentialism. In addition, he is accused of a misreading of the Cappadocian Fathers because he maintains that the Fathers insisted on a marked distinction between “person” and “individual,” the latter indicative of a negation of the idea of person as one who fully comes to true personhood realized in the mystery of κοινωνία. Therefore, the person eventually ends up as a “non-person,” an objectified entity in stark contrast to a subjective/relation being. As will be demonstrated later in this dissertation, Zizioulas’ response to his critics is that, if indeed he is using a notion of existentialism, it is radically different from and in maximum contrast to humanistic philosophical existentialism which, for the most part, acknowledges the person/individual as the ultimate measure of ontological reality and truth. Such an understanding of existentialism is rejected by Zizioulas in that he emphatically maintains the Trinitarian God as the source and goal of true authentic personhood. Man is not the measure of all things, as maintained by the ancient Greek philosopher Protagoras, et al., and the contemporary secular/humanistic school of existentialism; God is the measure of all things.
of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world—and defines himself afterwards. If man as the existential sees him as not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself. Thus, there is no human nature because there is no God to have a conception of it. Man simply is.\textsuperscript{223}

Sartre’s position is based on his nihilistic premise that denies the existence of God and is also antithetical to the philosophical traditions that long held the view of an ontological reality of human nature as a pre-existing reality, which each human by necessity inherits and possesses. In short, every human shares the same essence.\textsuperscript{224} This possession of a given human nature, in the Christian philosophical and theological tradition, is based on the belief that God created humanity and the cosmos \textit{ex nihilo} and that human nature as such is designedly a result of God’s love and intention, expressed in the \textit{imago dei} model and the Trinitarian offer of participation in that divine life.

Thus, Zizioulas’s contention, as cited above, that human nature does not exist must be clarified. Zizioulas’s idea actually contrasts sharply with Sartre’s, as Zizioulas maintains that \textit{such notions can only be perceived and reach their teleological fulfillment precisely because they are realities of God, that they are his creation, and that they exist only in relation to God.}

\begin{flushright}
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\end{flushright}
Hence, although both Zizioulas and Sartre hold that a generic human nature as such does not exist, their thought originates from radically different vantage points. For both thinkers, the “person” and “humanity/human essence” are meaningless terms based on the axial principle of *relationality*, either within the construct of the fideistic premises of Christian theology or that of atheistic existentialism. Either way, God is the central issue here and within the Christian *theoria*, the person and all of reality finds its *telos* in and through the incarnate Christ and his church:

According to the Greek Fathers, chiefly Irenaeus and Maximus, this history is endowed with a *telos*, a goal. The call has a specific content: the human being is called to bring creation into communion with God so that it may survive and participate in the life of the Holy Trinity. To this call, Adam in his freedom answered with a “no.” It was Christ who fulfilled it, thus revealing and realizing in himself what it means to be truly human.225

*Christ’s liberating salvific work* is meant ultimately to engage all persons, each as a *particular person*, in order to bring them into their uniqueness as children of God, each of whom remains an unrepeatable mystery of God’s creation in His own image. This salvation of the human person is accomplished through the *hypostatic union of the God-man Jesus Christ*. Every person, through Christ, has been liberated from the morass of the “givenness” of the confining and oppressive forces of definition, utility, isolation, absurdity, and ultimately death:

225 Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 43.
Salvation is defined in terms of absolute freedom, which for Zizioulas, is a freedom from the given. This given for created beings is created nature itself and the necessity of death. In communion with God, one transcends this givenness and is affirmed in his/her unique identity in an eternal relationship of love with the triune God.\textsuperscript{226}

The Solution for Radical Individualism

It is precisely through ekstasis and hypostasis that radical individualism can be rejected and overcome. The fetters of the objectification of the person, and the multitudinous implications and consequences of such objectification, are broken as God in Christ greets each person “face to face” in the intimacy of Trinitarian love. It is through the incarnate Word, the Second Adam, that the disintegrative principle of the Adamic fall, which is characterized by the idolization of the “self,” which leads to an ontology of individualism in the superlative sense, is ultimately overcome in Christ:

What does the ontological priority of personhood in God mean for the human being? Adam mistook the personal character of his being created “in the image of God,” and by his idolatrous self-assertion—over and against God who alone gave him being—the ontological primacy fell, in the case of humankind, from personhood to the common nature. Difference among human beings now came

through “individuation”, indeed individualism (“atomism”), so that each “individual” finally disappears with death into undifferentiated “nature.”

Hence, through the person of Jesus Christ and his salvific work, every human is liberated from the confines of individualism, which is symptomatic of the disintegrating dynamic of the givenness of biological existence whereby the human person is relegated to an “undifferentiated” nature. It is the incarnate Christ who restores the true personhood of each human in a Trinitarian relational ontology of the true-self which can only be lived in communion with the living God as person-to-person. Rather than being relegated to the undifferentiated nature characteristic of creation under the pall of death, it is through Christ’s victory over death and the restoration of the person that those united in him are rescued from a non-personal generic existence.

_____________________________


228 This person-to-person or person-with-person encounter is very well illustrated, for example, in the Eucharistic rite of Eastern Christianity. During the distribution of the Body and Blood of Christ during the Divine Liturgy, the communicants approach the chalice and the presbyter/deacon says the following words directed to each particular person: “The servant of God …., (at this point the communicant says his own name and the celebrant mentions/repeats the name)…receives the precious and most holy body of Our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting.” Within this rite each person’s name, which reflects his own unique identity as a particular person, prosopon, is confirmed and celebrated in the mystery of God’s κοινωνια.

This act of recognition and confirmation of identity is also reminiscent of the encounter of Mary Magdalene with the Risen Christ in the garden as reflected in one of the post-resurrection narratives. At first, Mary does not recognize the Risen Lord and it is only after Jesus calls her by name, “Mary,” does she recognize the Risen Lord and is able to respond in kind with the response, “Raboni.” While the relationship between Mary and Jesus is transfigured and changed in light of the resurrection, the intimacy between the Lord and one of his disciples at that moment takes on a deeper level and is by no means obliterated. Such is the divine gift of mutual recognition in the agapic intimacy experienced between Christ and humanity.
Zizioulas posits the notion that sin is not so much a matter of a juridical breach between Adam and God in the form of disobedience, but rather Adam’s/humanity’s volitional distortion of relationship:

If we recapture for a moment the existential content of the fall...sin reveals itself not in the form of a juridical relationship between God and man, but mainly as a perversion of personhood, leading through man’s idolatrous introversion towards created being alone, to the opening of the abyss of nothingness, that is, to the division between the two natures, divine and human, which were meant to be in communion, and hence to death because of the incapacity of nature to refer itself to God in its integrity. The absence of God was thus felt deeply in the person’s ecstatic nature as the abyss of nothingness, and man could not fulfill his drive for presence except tragically in and through absence. The ultimate meaning of the Fall was, therefore, in fact that by perverting personhood (personhood being the only way of communion with God) man turned the difference between uncreated and created natures into a division between the two, and thus ruined God’s purpose in creation.\(^{229}\)

How does the redeeming Christ remedy this radical division and atomization of the human person and the cosmos? It is precisely the integrative/unitive nature of the theanthropic Christ, the new Adam, who reveals in his human nature the priestly vocation abdicated by Adam. Jesus Christ, the High Priest, in his very being unites humanity and

\(^{229}\) Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 237-238.
the cosmos and in his anaphoric gesture offers himself and all to the Father as gift. In this light, the disintegrative principle associated with division is reversed in Christ, and the human person is resituated existentially once again within the mystery of communion in which difference in relation to the “other” is constitutive of the cosmic order as originally intended by God. The unitive nature of Christ becomes that existential ground in and through which humanity becomes liberated not only from the disintegrative principle of sin/death, but is restored to the life of salvation, as a participant in the synergistic dynamic of theosis.

We have now reflected on the notion of relational ontology as it concerns both the Trinitarian God, including the theological concept of perichoresis among the Divine Persons, and human personhood, as having been created in the image of God. Hence we must inquire: how and in what way(s) does this relational ontology emerge in praxis? The contribution of the Cappadocian Fathers to Trinitarian theology, and all theology for that matter, must not be consigned to the purview of theological/philosophical abstractions. Rather, these concepts have been born out of a lived theology, out of the dogmatic affirmations of the faith, which are experiential in nature, reflecting the inner-life/mystical life of the Church especially within the ground of the Eucharistic presence.

From Biological to Ecclesial Existence: The “Catholic Person”

As we have seen, Zizioulas distinguishes between the notions of “person” and “individual,” the former being in a communal or relational dynamic and the latter a self-contained being, a closed entity.²³⁰ In Zizioulas’s thought, the individual is the

²³⁰ Zizioulas, Being as Communion, 39.
“biological person,” trapped in an existence disconnected from God, self, nature, and fellow human beings. This disconnectedness, this disintegrative principle—in traditional biblical language known as sin—can be overcome, or better yet, transformed, only by the integrative and relational Truth of the incarnate Word and one’s baptism into the ecclesial body of Christ. For Zizioulas, “[t]o be is to exist in an eternal relationship with the loving God and only through such a relationship is created existence ‘free’ to be eternally in loving union with this God.”

This transformation from individual to person is rooted in the Christological and pneumatological vision of the church relative to the salvific work of Christ as confirmed and manifest through the Holy Spirit. The God who generates life and creation ex nihilo et ex amore is that foundational reality which constitutes the liberation of the person from the existential confines of ontological necessity to the ecstatic movement of freedom in love.

In Zizioulas’s thought, the human person as bound by the confines of an ontology of necessity is characterized as “the hypostasis of biological existence.” Because humans, in the strictly biological sense, are the result of eros between a man and a woman, the human is brought into this world as a biological entity. Given this ontological condition framed within that of necessity, the human finds himself in the existential realm as one “who exists,” a notion that is quite different from what it means to be “alive” in the truest sense of the word. To be truly alive, human life itself must be consummated in and through participation in Trinitarian life, theosis.

Zizioulas believes that humans are faced with two “passions” that interfere with or “destroy” the ultimate teleological principle of true personhood which lies at the core of human identity: the first is “ontological necessity” and the second is “individualism or separation of the hypostasis.”

His biological constitution of man’s hypostasis suffers radically from two “passions” which destroy precisely that toward which the human hypostasis is thrusting, namely the person. The first “passion” is what we might call “ontological necessity.” Constitutionally the hypostasis is inevitably tied to the natural instinct, to an impulse which is “necessary” and not subject to the control of freedom. Thus the person as a being “subsists” not in freedom but as necessity. As a result it does not have the power to affirm its hypostasis with absolute ontological freedom...if it attempts to raise freedom to the level of its ontological absoluteness; it will be confronted with the dilemma of nihilism.232

Coming to a true understanding of the “self” and the “other” requires the initiative and saving embrace of God. The salvific imperative here is the call for the “recapitulation” (as St. Irenaeus233 said) of all things through, in, and with the incarnate and risen Christ. This “identity” crisis can be healed and re-constituted only by life in Christ and his ecclesia which offers the liberating power of God’s love and the identification of each

______________________________

232 Zizioulas, Personhood and Being, 50–51.

person as his creature, his child, his unrepeatable mystery as true person and not just an “individual.” This confirmation of each person as person liberates each human from the unidentified being designated as the broad and impersonal “human nature.”

The second “passion” Zizioulas identifies results from the first passion of ontological necessity: “individualism or separation of the hypostasis.” The human person, because of the imposition of biological necessity and the subsequent “givenness” of a world under the weight of sin, death and finitude, is marked by disintegration. Here, disintegration refers to the loss of the integrity of the whole person, which is manifest in the catholic person, who is in communion with God and therefore open to participation in the “authenticity of life.” The biological necessity of the human, existing within time and space, and the resultant disruption of the universal/cosmic integrity through the fall of Adam, forms the matrix in which the human is destined for alienation from God and the true self:

All this means that man as a biological hypostasis is intrinsically a tragic figure. He is born as a result of an ecstatic fact—erotic love—but this fact is interwoven with a natural necessity and therefore lacks ontological freedom. He is born a hypostatic fact, as a body, but this fact is interwoven with individuality and with death. By the same erotic act with which he tries to attain ecstasy he is led to individualism. His body is the tragic instrument which leads to communion with others, stretching out a hand, creating language, speech, conversation, art, kissing. But at the same time it is the “mask” of hypocrisy, the fortress of individualism, the vehicle of the final separation, death. “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Rom. 7:24). The tragedy of the biological
constitution of man’s hypostasis does not lie in his not being a person because of it; it lies in his tending towards becoming a person through it and failing. Sin is precisely this failure. And sin is the tragic prerogative of the person alone.  

In light of this tragic existential, Zizioulas maintains that what is needed for the human is a redirection of one’s hypostatic nature, which can only be regained or transformed through a new mode of existence:

This means that although neither eros nor the body are abandoned, they nevertheless change their activity, adapt themselves to the new “mode of existence: of the hypostasis, reject from this activity of theirs which is constitutive of the human hypostasis whatever creates the tragic element in man, and retain whatever makes the person to be love, freedom, and life. This is precisely what constitutes that which I have called “the hypostasis of ecclesial existence.”

This “hypostasis of ecclesial existence” is initiated and perpetuated within the sacramental/mystical life of the ecclesia through the sacraments, in particular, of baptism/chrismation and the Eucharist. For Zizioulas, the regenerative principle which is offered for the unearthing of the human’s true self must be received as a gift which is “from above,” from the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit:

234 Ibid., 52.
235 Ibid., 53.
…in order to avoid the consequences of the tragic aspect of man which we have discussed, the person as absolute ontological freedom needs a hypostatic constitution without ontological necessity, his hypostasis must inevitably be rooted, or constituted, in an ontological reality which does not suffer from createdness. This is the meaning of the phrase in Scripture about being born ‘anew’ or ‘from above.’ (John 3: 3,7). It is precisely this possibility that patristic Christology strives to proclaim, to announce to man as the good news.

This gift is Christ, who, in truth and on the deepest levels, experiences and suffers the pain of death, nevertheless remains sinless. The ability to initiate and consummate this transformative reality of salvation cannot, as has been dogmatized by the Church, be accomplished by any person(s) who themselves are bound by the confines of the created order under the pall of sin, finitude and death:

If Christ as a person “subsists” not in freedom but according to the necessity of nature, then He too finally, that is, definitively, fails to escape the tragic aspect of the human person. The meaning of the virgin birth of Jesus is the negative expression of this existential concern of patristic theology. The positive expression of the same concern consists in the Chalcedonian doctrine that the person of Christ is one and is identified with the hypostasis of the Son of the Trinity.

…. 
Christology consequently is the proclamation to man that his nature can be “assumed” and hypostasized in a manner free from the ontological necessity of his biological hypostasis which, as we have seen, leads to the tragedy of individualism and death. Thanks to Christ, man can henceforth himself “subsist,” can affirm his existence as personal not on the basis of the immutable laws of his nature, but on the basis of a relationship with God which is identified with what Christ in freedom and love possesses as Son of God with the Father. This adoption of man by God, the identification of his hypostasis with the hypostasis of the Son of God, is the essence of baptism.236

Nor can the human person be saved through the medium or actions of any sociological construct of humans but only through the ecclesia, whose very identity and nature is not the result of a human construct, but of God’s.

The eschatological hope that lies at the very core of every human being is radically distinct from the fallen reality of this world. In this new mode of existence, the once limited and misdirected passions of eros, ekstasis, and the vision of the “self” as individuum are now healed and transformed by the embrace of the agapic love of God. This embrace, as gift and offering, is manifest in the incarnate and risen Christ who is hope incarnate. Based on the Chalcedonian affirmation of the hypostatic union of Christ as being fully divine and fully human, in union with him the human person is taken up in “ascension” whereby humanity, in and through the glorified and risen Christ,

236 Ibid., 54-56.
experiences an existential reorientation toward and in God, with the hope of the eschatological promise restored. It is in the archetype of the church that the eschatological promise is offered and experienced by the people of God, especially in the Eucharistic celebration.

Over and against the disintegrative reality of the world is revealed the mystery of the Eucharist, in the *ecclesia*, which, according to Zizioulas, reflects the early Church’s self-evident identity as being the eschatological image of creation saved and transfigured in Christ:

The divine Eucharist is the revelation of the Kingdom of God and quite simply the revelation of ultimate reality. The Eucharist reveals this reality which is future to us in the form of the present. In the form of the Eucharist all creatures are brought together and recapitulated in Christ. The Eucharist manifests and substantiates within time the identity of this assembly the form of the Church.237

As the church is the sacramental body of Christ in space and time, living in the reality of this world, so the Eucharistic consciousness of the church, which forms the essential existential base for relationship with the Trinity, serves as the integrative and catholic expression of salvation:

The Church has its basis in the Trinitarian life of God, that is to say, in ‘the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit’ (2Corinthians 13:13-14). Grace means that Jesus Christ is the gift of God, while the Holy Spirit enables us to exceed the limitation of our creaturely being and enter that communion with God which is God’s love.238

It is within the mystery of the life of the Church that each person finds himself participating in the eschatological hope of the age to come. The Eucharistic assembly celebrates the unity in Christ of all of humanity in and with the parousaic presence of the Risen Christ, who overcomes division and the existential estrangement faced by every person:

Christ is always in relationship with other humans, and thus to humanity and human nature in general. He is never an individual in isolation who subsequently comes into a variety of relationships. He cannot be known apart from his body, the communion of those made holy in him, so there is no Christ without his Church. He is the head that sustains his body. Christ does not stand at a distance from the Church, so we cannot contrast it with him, but he is the Church’s true identity, and the source from which it comes. The Church is therefore nothing other than the kingdom of God in which Christ reigns. The Church is holy because “One is holy, One is the Lord, Jesus Christ.” Despite all the sinfulness of

238 Ibid., 139.
its members, the Church remains holy because Christ is its “person” and identity.\textsuperscript{239}

Thus, the static imagery of the human person as a “given” through biological necessity, in the most mundane of terms, is transformed by the dynamic of the agapic love offered by God, which hence serves as the restorative principle for every human being:

The eternal survival of the person as a unique, unrepeatable and free “hypostasis,” as loving and being loved, constitutes the quintessence of salvation, the bringing of the Gospel to man. In the language of the Fathers, this is called “divinization” (\textit{theosis}), which means participation not in the nature or substance of God, but in His personal existence. The goal of salvation is that the personal life which is realized in God should also be realized on the level of human existence. Consequently salvation is identified with the realization of personhood in man.\textsuperscript{240}

The “catholicity” of each person is reflected in the immersion of each person in the baptismal and Eucharistic mysteries. Christ as the integrative principle, the Person in which all reality finds its meaning and identity, is foundational to Zizioulas’s thought. When thinking of the Eucharistic presence, we must keep in mind the clarion call of Zizioulas that Christ’s presence, in order to be experienced in the fullness of faith, cannot be experienced except within the holistic and prismatic vision of the entire economy of

\textsuperscript{239} Ibid., 116.

\textsuperscript{240} Zizioulas, \textit{Being as Communion}, 49-50.
salvation. Human persons, when assumed and recapitulated in Christ, are immersed in the eschatological promise of the newness of life in the risen Lord:

The divine Eucharist is the revelation of the kingdom of God and so quite simply the revelation of ultimate reality. The Eucharist reveals this reality which is future to us in the form of the present. In the form of the Eucharist all creatures are brought together and recapitulated in Christ. The Eucharist manifests and substantiates within time the identity of this assembly in the form of the Church. When we want to speak of the actual lived experience of the Church we have to start from the Eucharist, for this is where the Church appears. The Eucharist is the free coming together of all parts into their proper relationships and so into the good order of the whole in which each creature is liberated from the limits given by its own nature. This liberation is the eternal will of the Father which the Son has substantiated and which the Spirit now makes possible for us to share.  

As such, the Eucharistic assembly remains the gift revealed and made present by the Holy Spirit, who moves humanity to partake of the banquet table the agapic koinonia of the Trinitarian God.

In sum, among the theological insights Zizioulas offers for considering the Eucharistic presence, perhaps the most outstanding is his insistence on the relational aspects of the human person within the Eucharistic mystery. Person, as understood in such strong relational terms is most evidenced within the multileveled and experiential

---

241 Ibid., 138.
grounding of the Eucharistic mystery. If indeed the Eucharistic celebration is the
celebration of the union of God and humanity, it is primarily in this mystical union that
God manifests and encounters all of humanity. In this aspect, Zizioulas’s thought relies
on the contribution of the Cappadocian Fathers as they address the radical
impersonalization of the human, which is not only a characteristic trait of Hellenistic
philosophy but also an important factor in contemporary sociological trends.

Finally, because Zizioulas begins with the Trinity in describing the human person,
the first of the three important points we have looked at here is an understanding of the
life of the Trinity as relational. Zizioulas carries this idea forward in his discussion of the
human person, showing that the person is neither fully person, fully functional, nor fully
developed unless he is drawn first into a relationship with God and then with his fellow
man—and the latter cannot occur without the former. From these theories, Zizioulas
draws his truly creative notions of the biological and ecclesial person, demonstrating that
true personhood is achievable only in the sacraments, especially baptism and the
Eucharist. Thus, the only fulfillment for the human person is within the ecclesial
community. Zizioulas’s presentation of the Eucharistic presence as primarily personal
and relational offers much in addressing post-modern man and addressing the depth of
his loneliness. God’s presence is not limited to some psychological phenomenon or social
construct; rather, it is the inauguration of the Kingdom in this world—the Eucharistic
presence is “God With Us.”

As a preface to the next chapter which addresses the desire for unity of the Orthodox
and Roman Catholic Churches based on a common Eucharistic consciousness, it may
serve us well at this juncture to turn our attention to the thought of Nicolas Afanasiev
regarding his insights into the notion of eucharistic ecclesiology, a notion which works in tandem with the Eucharistic imagery of Zizioulas, specifically that of Eucharistic *koinonia* and may serve as another link between the two Churches.

In his work, *Una Sancta*, Afanasiev reveals a penchant for the model of eucharistic ecclesiology over and above what he describes as a universal ecclesiology. Universal ecclesiology, which was characteristic of Cyprian’s model of the Church, and remains operative today, is the framework within which the contemporary Orthodox and Catholic Churches view their respective identities. The universal model proposes that each local church finds its identity in reference to the universal church. As its reference is to the universal, the local church gathered around its bishop, and the bishops gathered together in collegiality and, ultimately with the Pope of Rome, constitute the universal church according, for example, to the Catholic ecclesiology. Therefore, the characteristics of the church as one, holy, catholic and apostolic find their legitimacy through a universal church headed by the Pope of Rome.

In stark contrast to this model of ecclesiology, both Afanasiev and Zizioulas maintain that such a model is, although rooted in Cyprian’s view of the Church and surely that of the contemporary Orthodox and Roman Churches, fuels the failure to see that each local church in the Eucharistic celebration, gathered around its bishop, does indeed possess the fullness of the faith; its oneness, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity as it was in the early Church, and remains operative within Orthodox ecclesiology. However, Zizioulas does emphasize that the community among bishops worldwide is a necessary condition for unity to be manifest and that the fullness of the Church resides in the local church in the communion among the bishops throughout the world.
In the order of ideas of universal ecclesiology, the Church of God on earth is a universal entity, embracing all the local churches there. All the attributes of the Church: holiness, unity, catholicity, and apostolicity are characteristic of this universal reality. The local churches as parts of the universal church do not themselves possess these attributes. They only possess these attributes through the universal Church, insofar as they are part of her. Such is the basic thesis of Cyprian as well as that of contemporary universal ecclesiology. Nevertheless, there is another thesis opposed to that of Cyprian. All of the attributes of the Church I indicated belong to the local church. This thesis is found in the primitive theology that I have called eucharistic. As the body of Christ, the Church manifests herself in all her fullness in the eucharistic assembly of the local church, because Christ is present in the Eucharist in the fullness of his body. This is why the local church possesses all the fullness of the Church. Put differently, she is the Church of God in Christ.242

The local church, gathered around the bishop is, in the fullest and most superlative sense, the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. Hence, according to Eucharistic ecclesiology, when the Eucharist is being celebrated by each local community, whether Orthodox or Catholic, the unity in and of Christ is being manifested and celebrated. Unity based on a juridical/canonical principle is not only insufficient but detrimental to the very nature of the eucharistic consciousness of the Church.

According to eucharistic ecclesiology, when we participate in the eucharistic assembly, we are united with all those who at that moment also participate in eucharistic

---

assemblies – not only those of the orthodox church but also those of the catholic church-for everywhere there is one and the same Eucharist being celebrated. There are not different Eucharists. We have completely forgotten this, because in our consciousness, the idea of eucharistic unity has been replaced by that of canonical unity.  

The Eucharistic gathering by its very nature as Church manifests and celebrates the unity of the community by virtue of the unifying presence of the risen Christ. Afanasiev attempts to raise our consciousness to the need for an ecclesiology based on eucharistic koinonia, in contrast to that of a juridical and canonical model of a universal ecclesiology.  

On an ecumenical level, another point worth noting is Afanasiev’s desire to uncover the koinonia already enjoyed by the Orthodox and Catholics within the celebration of the Eucharist and in doing so offers a hopeful sign for eventual eucharistic communion. This aspect of koinonia, which is central to the theological expression of Zizioulas, provides us with an opportunity to explore and integrate some aspects of Afanasiev’s theological vision relative to the relationship between Orthodox and Catholic Christians and the integrative notion of catholicity.  

Also, in his brief but insightful treatise, “The Eucharist: the Principal Link between the Catholics and Orthodox,” Afanasiev maintains that in essence, the Orthodox and Catholic Churches, despite the language of separation and detachment, share a common Eucharistic life. While history attests to the divisive rhetoric employed by both Churches, the unity celebrated in the One Eucharist remains untouched. For Afanasiev,

\[243\] Ibid., 24
the employment of any language descriptive of the notion of separation of the churches is at best left to the arena ecclesial canonicity and at worst the results of our sinfulness. The Eucharist is celebrated *de facto* by all who are united in and by its celebration and that unity, despite our differences perceived or otherwise, is not broken for that unity is beyond the grasp of our sinfulness. Regrettably, the Eucharistic *koinonia* which is characteristic of the Christian life has not found definitive expression between the Churches to date essentially because of the notion of canonical order and not that of communion in the deepest sense of the word. “This is why the Eucharist is not only a link between the catholic and the orthodox church,244 but also the manifestation of the unity of the churches.”245

For Afanasiev, fraternal love within and because of the Church, will overcome and defeat those issues which still are proposed to be problematic. A call for doctrinal truth embraced by love and love expressive of doctrinal truth seems to be not only Afanasiev’s corrective but conviction that love proves victorious.

244 The reader will notice that, given the present state of the Orthodox and Catholic Churches, Afanasiev indicated that he preferred using the lower case when referencing the terms catholic and orthodox.
245 Afanasiev, “The Eucharist: The Principal Link Between the Catholics and the Orthodox,” in *Tradition Alive*, 49.
CHAPTER FIVE: SEEKING A COMMON TABLE: UNITY IN THE EUCHARIST

“Through the celebration of the Eucharist of the Lord in each of these Churches, the Church of God is built up and grows in stature. …although these Churches are separated from us, they possess true sacraments, above all—by apostolic succession—the priesthood and the Eucharist, whereby they are still joined to us in a very close relationship.”

In this chapter, I will first address any differences that remain in Eucharistic perspectives between the Catholic and Orthodox churches, demonstrating that those presented here are mutually held, but perhaps not emphasized in the same way(s), in both churches. I will then present a synthesis of the main tenets of the theological visions of the three theologians whose work has been explored in the foregoing chapters. I will address the dilemma of the Church in the face of postmodernism, the need to present a united witness before a fragmented world, and will show why the Eucharistic theology here presented may be especially effective in speaking to postmodern man as opposed to using the language of scholasticism. Finally, I will briefly address recent advances on the road to unity, including the work of both John Paul II and Benedict XVI, discuss the obstacles that remain, and examine what shape a unified church might take.

The words quoted at the heading of this chapter from the text, “The Decree on Ecumenism,” reflect a sense of filiation by the Catholic Church toward the Churches of the East, specifically the Orthodox Church. A number of Popes and Eastern Patriarchs—

especially in more recent times—despite all road-blocks and challenges, have maintained a sense of dignified respect for their “sister churches.” This can be notably seen, for example, in the life and writings of John Paul II, whose abiding respect and love for the Eastern Church is rooted in the spirit of apostolic charity and love. It was John Paul II who encouraged the theologians of the Catholic Church, in particular the Byzantine Catholic Church, to look to the East as the great repository of a theology deeply rooted in the apostolic faith and the faith of the Fathers.

To some, the words of Pope John Paul II quoted above may appear as an appeal by the Catholic Church to the Orthodox Church to strive together within the greater hope of eventual full sacramental union. For some of the faithful in both Churches, ecumenical personalities like John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI bring a most welcome and resounding sense of joy within the recesses of their hearts. Others may not be so convinced or moved. The persistent calls for eventual union from members of both Churches may ring hollow and be viewed as mere platitudes.

While not questioning the noble intent of the Popes, the Orthodox Patriarchs, and the faithful who seek unity, some thinkers remain skeptical, perhaps because of frustration from centuries of failed attempts to achieve unity, as well as the fostering of a certain sense of antagonism between the Churches. Such words may appear one-sided, weighted heavily on the “Catholic side” of things, and perhaps somewhat patronizing. The reference to other Churches as being “separated from us,” for example, may be regarded as quite exclusive in nature and reminiscent of a polarized worldview, with the Catholic Church seeming to identify itself as the ultimate point of reference. Another point of contention may be noticed in reference to the Catholic Church’s
declaring that, in their analysis, the Orthodox Church enjoys “true apostolic succession” and the sacraments are “true,” or “valid.” To some Orthodox and faithful of other Christian communities, this position is the epitome of patronization. How can any Church impose upon another Church, in this case the Catholic on the Orthodox, an evaluation of the truth or validity of their sacraments? Those who think along these lines take the position that the Orthodox do not need any external body to validate the Orthodox Christian Church’s self-identity nor to the truth/validity relative to the sacraments. However, we should remember the context in which these positions were taken. I believe that the Catholic Church’s recognition of apostolic succession and the sacramental integrity of the Orthodox Church stems not from a desire to patronize but from sincere filial love and koinonia, from a desire to show that Catholics and Orthodox hold essentially the same beliefs with regard to an important mark of the True Church—that to be valid, the sacraments must be administered by bishops and priests in true apostolic succession. I believe this is most certainly the case during the papacy of John Paul II and no less with the current pope, Benedict XVI.

Some attitudes within the Orthodox Church are quite negative toward any suggestion of reconciliation of the Churches, with some going so far as to censure any Orthodox who even exhibit a hint of becoming a dialogue partner on any level with any Christian community. Also, the Orthodox Church still suffers from what Schmemann referred to as an “exclusive isolation” as can be seen in the various ethnic centered parishes spread throughout the Orthodox Church in the Western Hemisphere. Whatever

247 Michael Plekon, “The Church, the Eucharist and the Kingdom: Towards an Assessment of Alexander Schmemann’s Theological Legacy,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (1996): 143.
position one takes in this ongoing dialogue between the Churches, there is a welcoming
sign of desire for such a union, and this desire continues to serve as the impetus to pave
the way to full Eucharistic communion.

Current Obstacles to Union

Though it is the primary task of this chapter to present a synthesis of some of the
salient points offered through the theological visions of Chauvet, Schmemann, and
Zizioulas as possible pointers toward unity, I first would like to look briefly at the “state
of things.” What are the chief obstacles to unity?

The question of dogmatic integrity for both Churches remains a central issue
regarding unity. How can each tradition celebrate the Eucharist at a common table and,
at the same time, not compromise its dogmatic integrity? This issue is addressed by John
Paul II:

Taking up an idea expressed by Pope John XXIII at the opening of the Council,
the Decree on Ecumenism mentions the way of formulating doctrine as one of the
elements of a continuing reform. Here it is not a question of altering the deposit of
faith, changing the meaning of dogmas, eliminating essential words from them,
accommodating the truth to the preferences of a particular age, or suppressing
certain articles of the Creed under the false pretext that they are no longer
understood today. The unity willed by God can be attained only by adherence of
all to the content of revealed faith in its entirety. In matters of faith, compromise
is in contradiction with God who is Truth. In the Body of Christ, “the way, and
the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:16) who could consider legitimate a reconciliation
brought about at the expense of truth? A “being together” which betrayed the
truth would thus be opposed both to the nature of God who offers his communion and to the need for truth found in the depths of every human heart.\(^{248}\)

For some Orthodox, the act of a shared celebration at the Eucharistic table cannot be *the means* for eventual communion but rather, *the culmination and celebration of a common faith* which the Orthodox and Catholic Churches enjoyed as normative prior to the various schisms which took place throughout history:

Conscience holds us back from celebrating our unity as complete in sacramental terms, until it is complete in faith, Church structure, and common action; but conscience also calls us to move beyond complacency in our divisions, in the power of the Spirit and in a longing for the fullness of Christ’s life-giving presence in our midst. The challenge and the invitation to Orthodox and Catholic Christians, who understand themselves to be members of Christ’s Body precisely by sharing in the Eucharistic gifts and participating in the transforming life of the Holy Spirit, is now to see Christ authentically present in each other, and to find in those structures of leadership that have shaped our communities through the centuries a force to move us beyond disunity, mistrust, and competition, and towards the oneness in his Body, that obedience to his Spirit, that will reveal us as his disciples before the world.\(^{249}\)

\(^{248}\) Ibid., no. 18.

Certain divisive issues, which remain even until the present day, challenge the most ardent of theologians so that the concerns are neither neglected as totally irrelevant, nor amplified to the status of un-resolvability. Of course there are varying degrees of the unresolved issues to date, some issues carrying more weight and consequence than others: e.g., the various understandings, misunderstandings, and interpretations of the nature and scope of the papacy, the still-to-be resolved issue of the *filioque*, and any number of other theological points.\textsuperscript{250}

It may be that many of the remaining schismatic issues can be overcome with a degree of ease; others will not be so easy. Perhaps the greatest challenge lies in overcoming the “schismatic atmosphere” that pervades the Churches today, as this may prove even more difficult to resolve and transcend than any particular theological issue. The regaining of mutual trust between the constituencies of each respective tradition also remains a challenge. However, there are signs of hope. One is reminded of the mutual lifting of the anathemas by the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras and Pope Pius VI on December 7, 1965. The original anathemas, which occurred in the year 1054 AD, were mutually imposed between Patriarch Michael Cerularius and Pope Leo IX by way of his papal legate.\textsuperscript{251} The lifting of these anathemas as a sign of reconciliation in 1965 was

\textsuperscript{250} For a paradigm for what a united Church may look like, not only regarding the Orthodox and Catholic Churches, but including a variety of other Christian communities, cf. Heinrich Fries and Karl Rahner, *Unity of the Churches: An Actual Possibility* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985).

\textsuperscript{251} It may be noted that the anathemas imposed in 1054 AD did not effectively impede the union enjoyed between the Eastern and Western Christians of that time. While certainly not helping matters in terms of the relationship between East and West, one wonders how deeply the relationships among the clergy and laity were really affected on theological and practical levels. As history attests, there were many other factors which lent itself to a “period of estrangement” (John Meyendorff) between East and West including
initiated by the Pope and Patriarch to serve as a catalyst to begin the healing process of the toxic atmosphere of division. This posture of filial embrace between the two “sister churches” has been exemplified in recent times by the complementary visits of Patriarch Bartholomew and Pope Benedict XVI, as well as continued developments in theological discourse on international and national levels. Terminology such as “sister churches” and the Church “breathing with two lungs,” referencing the complementary relationship between the East and West, is characteristic of contemporary dialogical language. While the 1965 gesture between the Pope and the Patriarch was well intended and may continue to serve as a contributing factor in the ongoing process of seeking reconciliation, one may today question whether these actions did or do much to resolve the issues that separate the two Churches. One can only hope that the “eucharistic hunger” for unity and union provide some common ground, perhaps beginning with the ground of the Eucharist itself.

In his address to the 3rd Catholic-Orthodox Forum in Lisbon, Portugal, on June 6, 2012, Metropolitan Prof. Dr. Gennadios of Sassima, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, offered these words of wisdom: “this sacred gift of unity is something that also demands of us radical conversion and re-orientation so that we may humbly return to our common issues related to politics, sociology, geography and eventually theology, i.e., the papacy and the filioque. Some historians note that the schism between the East and West was fueled by the Crusades, particularly the Fourth Crusade, when certain crusaders sacked the church of the Ecumenical Patriarch and pillaged the relics and sacred vessels, among other things. This indeed created a psychological shock-wave throughout the East. The question remains: to what degree and to what depth did the so-called schism of 1054 adversely affect the daily life of the church and, by the same token, what affect, if any, does the mutual lifting of the anathemas in 1965 have on the life of the church today? It is hoped that the legacy of these two prelates will be appreciated at least on the level of the filial relationship that was intended by these two men. For the content of their declaration, cf. Joint Declaration of Pope Paul VI and the Patriarch of Constantinople Athenagoras I (7 December 1965): Tomos Agapis, (1958-1970), Rome-Istanbul, 1971, 280–281.
roots in the Apostolic Church and the communion of saints, but also that we may entrust ourselves and submit to God’s heavenly kingdom and authority.”

Thus, while the Orthodox and Catholic churches do indeed share a common theological vision and expression of the faith in many areas, theological issues remain unresolved, particularly in the area of ecclesiology. As a cautionary point, there is no room for naïveté within this ecumenical enterprise and, most assuredly, as well regarding the very topic and proposal of this dissertation. Many stumbling-blocks remain in the path toward union, and many of them are legitimate. As long as each of these Churches reflect creatively and honestly on their own histories, however, and re-evaluate past and current theological expressions—which, many times, have been shaped by philosophical, theological, historical, sociological and psychological considerations—the door of dialogue remains open. Perhaps within this post-modern atmosphere a demand exists for a certain responsibility on the part of theologians to confront past theological constructs and assumptions, and the task of honest scrutiny of both traditions also called for.

Despite numerous points of convergence between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches regarding a common Eucharistic perspective, certain Eucharistic practices differ between the two traditions. First, there is the Catholic practice of Eucharistic devotions such as Adoration of the host in the Blessed Sacrament, the celebration of the Feast of Corpus Christi, etc. To my knowledge, nothing like these devotions ever developed within the Eastern tradition, primarily because it is understood that the Eucharistic gifts are meant for consumption. Beyond that, there is no other evidence of

---

the Eucharistic gifts being recognized as anything other than “food and drink” and most notably within the context of the Eucharistic celebration, i.e., the Divine Liturgy or Mass. There is, of course, the practice of the “reserved sacrament” in the East whereby the consecrated gifts are placed in a repository (artophorion) for later distribution to the sick, home-bound, prisoners, etc., by the bishop, presbyter, or deacon. But there are no devotions to the gifts as such in the Eastern Church. Second, one could point to the Liturgy of the Pre-sanctified gifts, celebrated in the East during the time of the Great Fast, as a Eucharistic devotional practice. (The only pre-sanctified liturgy in the Western Church is for Mass on Good Friday.) However, this Liturgy developed not as a devotional rite related to the Eucharistic gifts but, once again, for consumption and consumption alone. The offering of the pre-sanctified gifts came about in order to sustain the faithful during the weekdays of Lent in which, in the East, the celebration of the Divine Liturgy is accomplished only on Saturdays and Sundays of the fast, given the penitential ethos of the weekdays of Lent. In light of this, I believe that the devotional Eucharistic practices which developed in the West and which remain foreign to the East pose no obstacle for full Eucharistic communion. I believe that the East and West do and can maintain their respective perspectives of the Eucharist without compromising any theological doctrine. For example, the Byzantine Catholic Church maintains a liturgical/Eucharistic ordo very close, if not at times identical, to that of the Orthodox liturgical tradition. What we see here is the Byzantine Church, in full communion with Rome, maintaining a liturgical ethos expressive of the Orthodox Church’s tradition while maintaining foundational theological doctrines of both the East and West.
The stated thesis of this dissertation is that Chauvet, Schmemann, and Zizioulas can offer their particular insights and expertise in sacramental theology in general, and particularly in Eucharistic theology, each person working creatively within the parameters of their respective creedal confessions. These three theologians share a common theological vision based on the axial truths of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. As an adherence to the creed would imply, these three theologians promote not a faith of the intellect only, but rather an authentic ecclesial life, the life of praxis rooted in faith. As each theologian addresses and analyzes the Eucharistic issues at hand, he does so by and through a shared commonality of faith coupled with a desire to address the challenges of the post-modern age. In addition, in terms of historicity, each of these theologians is conversant within a common epoch, the three sharing a number of similar challenges shaped by the questions peculiar to their time.

Though the ecumenical dialogue between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches has enjoyed periods of engagement throughout the past decades and has been renewed in the present, progress has been slow and, at times, non-existent. This thesis has proposed that if there are any points of convergence through which these two venerable traditions can merge toward union, the mystery of the Eucharistic celebration may provide such a point. It remains the fundamental love of each of these traditions, the axial experiential element around which all theology revolves. Each tradition shares a common “Eucharistic consciousness” (Zizioulas) which, after all, is the supreme expression of faith, practice, and mission.

We are, however, left with a question: Is it feasible to regard the Eucharist as the common ground for dialogue and eventual unity? We must consider whether the
Eucharist, and the various understandings of the Eucharist itself, coupled with the plethora of meanings regarding Eucharistic presence, can truly serve as a legitimate and meaningful subject within the dialectic between the two Churches leading to eventual union. Furthermore, one must factor in the multiplicity and complexity of ecclesiological issues, dogmatic issues, etc., which should be attended to and resolved.

In response to these concerns, as well as many others, we can perhaps offer as the saving concept, a holistic vision of the Eucharistic celebration and the notion of a Eucharistic ecclesiology, a concept that has become operative within contemporary dialogue: that is, the Eucharist understood as the celebration and manifestation of the all-encompassing work of God’s redemption, the source and telos of all theology and theological discourse in the truest sense of the word. This fullness of faith is realized every time the Eucharist is celebrated in the local community. This vision, this saving reality, is indeed shared by both traditions and should not be underestimated in its potential for creating a common vision. Both traditions drink deeply from the well of the Tradition, which we can hope will serve as a unifying factor. Recall that the ancient Patristic writers, and for that matter the faithful believers of the early Church, viewed worship, sacraments, etc., in a much more holistic and prismatic fashion than does the modern believer. Indeed, one would venture to say that the three theologians cited in this dissertation share the same holistic vision characteristic of the early Church and, most importantly, the liturgical rites, prayers, and “language” of the Eucharistic celebration.

The scholarship of Chauvet, Schmemann, and Zizioulas is, in a real sense, engaged in the “deconstruction” of the various theological structures in the mindset of the Church which for centuries became a normative methodology for doing theology. Whether it is Chauvet’s concept of the presence-in-absence paradigm, Schmemann’s sacramental vision rooted in the natural sacramentality of the world and life itself, or Zizioulas’s emphasis on the ontology of the human person understood within the framework of a Christian existentialism, each of these theologians attempt to chip away at the various strata of “imposed” theology that has stifled what they believe to be the most authentic expression of the faith as per the normative metric: *lex orandi est lex credendi*. Their efforts may be likened to the restoring of a great mural or fresco in one of the Churches of either tradition, where the once vibrant colors and contours of the figures and scenes depicted have become obscured over time, covered with layers of smoke and soot from centuries of burning incense and candles. Perhaps the job of these theologians is to remove that which obscures the true depth and beauty of a theological mural which needs the same type of restoration, much like the mural or fresco, so that the bright image can shine once again.

---

Converging Views Toward a Common Vision of Eucharistic Presence: Symbolization and Inter-subjectivity as Key Elements of Eucharistic Presence

We now come to the question, What do these three theologians bring to the dialogue that, while maintaining a certain shared theological vision, yet at the same time offers insights unique to their experience and perspective—and to our time? First, two common features among all three theologians are the notions of inter-subjectivity and symbolization, which are highly significant for each theologian. One may also pose the following question: What is it about the theme of inter-subjectivity, or that which can be referred to as inter-personal relationality, that demands attention within the Eucharistic dialogue?

Here, we may start with the contribution of Chauvet. As proposed in chapter 2, Chauvet substantially emphasizes the attempt to liberate the notion of the human person, and indeed the matrix of sacramentality itself, from the confines of the metaphysical structures and terminology employed in the past for theological discourse and expression. For Chauvet, the ontological framework characteristic of the Scholastic period, which carried over to subsequent centuries, played a more-than-significant role in crafting and sustaining a sacramental worldview based on the onto-theological/philosophical presuppositions characteristic of that age. Among those presuppositions are the mechanistic/operative understandings of the sacraments and the objectification of those

---

255 Lathrop calls for a renewal in the churches for a rediscovery of the meaning of the liturgical prayers and rites as well as the impact that those rites and symbols have on the human person in prayer. Cf. Gordan W. Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).
elements within the sacramental order which were understood within the metaphysical categories of substance.

Given these inherited theological structures of the past, which are perpetuated among theologians even today, one of the primary issues Chauvet deals with is the eventual veritable reification of the notion of grace. Chauvet spends a great deal of time and labor on this particular issue because the theology of grace exemplifies, perhaps more than any other notion, a prominent example of a theological issue that has been understood for centuries to be based on a quantifiable/substantial ontological structure.

For Chauvet, this categorization of reality, including the Eucharist and most especially the focus on the Eucharistic elements, helped to create and maintain an operational/causal aspect within sacramental theology. The most natural foundational truth of the “encounter” with the personal, the notion of the “face-to-face,” the “I-Thou” relational dynamic, ultimately suffered under this ontological/operational, substantial structure. The corrective to this departure from the personal encounter is the concept of relationality as experienced in and through “the Other/other,” which is revealed, celebrated, and experienced within the world of the symbolic order that manifests the ecclesial mystery of the Body of Christ.

In Chauvet’s terms, this “coming into presence” of the Risen Lord is evidenced in the Eucharistic celebration, most notably within the structure of Jesus’s “lifting up” of bread and wine to God. The Eucharistic imperative of the Risen Lord is to “…take, eat…drink…”; “this is my body which is broken for you” (hyper); the “for you” in this sense reveals the profound mystery of the presence of the Lord that is expressive and characteristic of a dynamic of relational, interpersonal subjectivity. The assent to faith in
the Risen Lord within the ecclesial body is accomplished through our initiation and participation with the “other” in and through the symbolic order, expressly through the Eucharistic gifts, whereby the gift of God’s very being is offered through the symbol of the Body of Christ.

Schmemann concurs with Chauvet with a profound sense of relationality, as is most aptly expressed through the anaphoric gesture of the Church. Recall that Schmemann also challenged the accepted, traditional theological constructs and expressions inherited from the past. One is reminded, for example, of Schmemann’s criticism regarding the act of consecration and its eventual reduction to a mechanistic/operative paradigm. Likewise, as already noted in chapter 1, the paradigm of causality couched in traditional scholastic language, may not serve contemporary experience well. Why? Because this mechanistic approach to the sacrament and, in particular, relative to the mystery of presence—if seen through the lenses of cause and effect—falls short. A more existential personalism is needed, rooted in language characteristic of the notion of theosis: the dynamic movement in agapic growth and love between humanity and God. The “cause and effect” paradigm regarding Eucharistic relationality, in my estimation, proves insufficient in terms of contemporary language and experience, in which modern man seeks more of a sense of personal relationality. The cause-and-effect language belongs to the world of “the machine,” of physics, of natural science. Such language, because it evokes imagery belonging to the order of finitude and temporality, can be quite limiting in its impact on human interaction. Ultimately, the language of causality implies operating forces engaged in a dialectical construct whereby one force influences or controls the other through a certain type of interaction. For
example, the traditional scholastic causal epicletic language of the bread and wine within
the Eucharistic celebration through the “act of consecration,” implies one force (the Holy
Spirit) imposing on another entity (bread and wine) effecting a change through
Eucharistic word and gesture. Within this construct, the bread and wine become the body
and blood of Christ through a causal/operative event.

Subscribing to such an operative/causal paradigm in no way necessarily negates
the reality of the mystery of the consecration and what is accomplished through the grace
and power of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, it is the Holy Spirit who is the revelatory principle
of any epicletic dynamic on the part of the believing community. The epicletic nature
of all prayer is ultimately an invitation to the Holy Spirit as Person who is the witness of
revelation and confirmation of presence. For example, recall the language of the
consecratory prayer ascribed to St. Basil the Great, as referenced earlier. This
anaphoric prayer supplicates the Holy Spirit to reveal the bread and wine offered within
the Eucharist to be the very body and blood of Christ. This revelatory, epiphanic
approach to consecration, I believe, would do well to serve contemporary humanity who,
because of the scientific mindset of modernity, is looking for ontological change and
proofs within the paradigms of cause and effect on virtually every level of human
existence. Such a myopic scientific world-view can, in the larger picture of experience,
betray or at least lessen a sense of mystery, the mysterium tremendum which is attested
to by generations of saints and mystics of numerous and various religious convictions. It

256 For insight into the anaphoric prayer ascribed to St. Basil the Great, cf. Cyprian Robert Hutcheon, “‘A
Sacrifice of Praise’: A Theological Analysis of the Pre-Sanctus of the Byzantine Anaphora of St. Basil,” St.
is one thing to encounter personal presence on the level of a static, rigid ontology of personhood or “thingness”; it quite another reality to encounter the “other” as revealed and perceived in an inexhaustible mystery of eternal mutuality.

Here we are confronted with two different approaches to Eucharistic language and expression: the causal/mechanistic model and the model of mysterion. While these two models are not necessarily in radical opposition to each other in terms of manifesting the notion of presence, they are surely different in approach and emphasis.

No matter what model or language is employed to express Eucharistic presence, the verity and efficacy of the truth of Eucharistic consecration is not the issue. Rather it is crucial at this time in the Church’s history to broaden our theological horizons to include a recapturing of a sense of Eucharistic mystery and wonder on the most personal of levels. I do not propose that the theological discourse of today totally discard cause-and-effect language, nor can we totally eradicate language relative to metaphysics, but such metaphysical language must remain subservient to the language of the mystery of personal presence and of mystery in general.

Such operational language, I believe, does little quench the hunger and thirst of humanity who seeks a relationship with “the Other” in an embrace of mutual recognition and celebration. Indeed, such operative language opens the door for us humans to become victims of the scientific rather than free persons in the world of mystery. The mechanistic approach does not do justice to the mystery of the eternal discovery of person as person, person to person, as offered in the symbolic world of liturgical language and gesture. To emphasize my point, recall that, like Chauvet, Schmemann insists that the consecration of the Eucharistic gifts by the “descent of the Holy Spirit” upon the ecclesia, as well as the
gifts offered within the symbolic order of ecclesial experience and celebration, is ultimately a relational, inter-subjective certainty:

But if the consecration is the revelation, the evidence, the gift of the Kingdom of God, of Trinitarian life, then the consecration is always communion with the Kingdom as the grace of the Son, the love of the Father and the Communion of the Holy Spirit. The Father reveals the Son, who reveals the Father, who sends the Spirit – as knowledge, relation, communion.²⁵⁷

Concurrent with Chauvet and Schmemann on the topic of relationality is Zizioulas’s conviction of the ultimacy of the relational aspect of sacramental realities, most especially the Eucharistic assembly itself. Zizioulas’s treatment of the relational aspect of the encounter of the Three Persons of the Trinity, and the perichoretic dynamism characteristic of Trinitarian life, works in tandem with Chauvet’s assessment of and correctives to an inherited system of thought based not on inter-subjectivity, but reflective of a static ontology of the human person. In addition, note that Zizioulas and Chauvet, in addressing the notion of “being,” particularly the ontological nature of the human person, both offer their respective correctives to what each identifies as a static ontology of personhood, which ultimately betrays the dynamic and free constitutive aspect of relational reciprocity. As creatures created in the image of God, the human person is offered the gift of the “grace of reciprocity” rooted in unconditional agapic love, offered and received in absolute freedom: freedom in the deepest sense of the word.

²⁵⁷ Schmemann, The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom, 275.
For Chauvet, Schmemann, and Zizioulas, it is within the relationality of the sacramental/symbolic order—that is, the *ecclesia*—in which each person who is baptized into the Risen Christ is offered the gift of true personhood and relationality based not on any secular sociological, anthropological, or psychological paradigm, but in the Holy Spirit. This is the journey of the human person, the journey of *theosis*, lived within the Eucharistic mystery. Zizioulas’s contribution of the term “the hypostasis of ecclesia existence”\(^{258}\) or “catholic person,”\(^{259}\) serves as a descriptor of the one who has been embraced by God in Christ and wrested from the dead-end of simple biological existence. Within this ecclesial life a new horizon emerges for humanity, the possibility of the union of the human person with the eternal God as a partaker of divine nature through the gift of grace.

One of the most prominent points offered by Zizioulas is the subjugation of the notion of “person” to the Hellenistic world of fate. Within this worldview, Zizioulas maintains that the human as person ultimately abdicates his existential freedom as a creature of God. This abdication is exemplified through at least two oppressive and constrictive elements; that of submission to the gods coupled with that of biological necessity. Zizioulas calls for a perception of the human person as one liberated through the Risen Christ from the confines, not only of biological necessity but from the inflated

\(^{258}\) Zizoulas, *Personhood and Being*, 53.

\(^{259}\) Ibid., 58.
ego of the “I,” described by “individualism.” These two points epitomize the degradation of the human person as a categorized entity—an object.

In concert with Zizioulas, John Paul II championed the cause for the restoration of the dignity of the human person as a creature created in the image of God. For John Paul II, every person is an unrepeatable mystery, a child of God which no category of materialistic value can suffice as a metric of what it means to be “person.” Through his extensive travels throughout the world, his countless gestures of fatherly love exhibited through his presence among millions, as well as his numerous encyclicals and exhortations reminding the world of the sanctity of life, John Paul II witnessed in word and deed to the triumph of the Resurrection over the sin and death in the world. With Zizioulas et al., the pope was deeply aware of the existential crisis of modern humanity plagued with radical individualism, egoism, and self-aggrandizement which, ironically, fuels the death of the person on multitudinous levels.

The remedy for these maladies is the offering of Jesus Christ to enjoy the gift of true freedom—the agapic freedom enjoyed among the Persons of the Trinity. This freedom wrought by Christ allows each person to emerge from the confines of objectification and radical individualism to the new ecclesial being who lives within the authenticity of Divine Life. The oppressive mask which distorts the true nature of

\[260\] Zizioulas, Being as Communion, 49.

\[261\] Two particularly outstanding examples of John Paul’s emphasis on the extraordinary dignity of the human person are his 1995 encyclical Evangelium Vitae (http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae_en.html) and his series of audiences extending over more than five years (from September 1979 to November 1984) on the theology of the body (available from http://www.ewtn.com/library/papaldoc/jp2/bind.htm).
personhood has been removed through the harrowing of Hades by the Risen Christ. It is Christ, through the mysteries of the Church, who offers agapic freedom to humanity in and through the Eucharistic celebration which confirms and celebrates the unique identity of each person as the image of God embraced by *koinonia* as truth:

With God, each person of God is the entire being, not a portion of the being of God. Because man is made in the image of God, we can find analogies between God and man that are based in the relationships of the persons of God. The doctrine of the Trinity gives us the truth of our own existence.  

In this dialogue, it is Chauvet who fittingly addresses the emergence of the notion of a new horizon, applying this understanding to the thoroughly personal, intersubjective, and relational aspects of the symbolic order. As noted earlier in this dissertation, the symbolic order trumps the metaphysical, instrumental, and causal methodologies and hermeneutics so familiar from past theological discourse. The mediatory nature of the symbolic order becomes the arena in which the dynamic of intersubjectivity remains the normative ground for mutual exchange. When the human person as “subject” is posited within the dialogical/experiential framework of the world of the symbolic, that person is open to discovery. Zizioulas’s insight regarding the ontological shift, from the biological to the ecclesial person, that takes place at baptism applies here as well. It is through this shift, this ontological change, that the human person is brought into the world of the symbolic order and language of the church, into a

---

framework in which he can be embraced by the “language and order of God.” Such a shift opens one to a new vista “from above,” confirming that which is good and well-ordered within creation and each person’s life as revealed in the Holy Spirit.

This discovery, among other things, reveals the integrative and over-arching language of the world as symbolic which evokes new horizons of identity through a confrontation with the self as well as the “other.” This confrontational dialectic serves as the medium through which humans discover themselves as partners within the greater universe of a language that speaks of transformation in and through the grace of Christ’s presence, the presence of Truth. This knowledge of the Truth transcends the limited language of any epistemological construct and yields to the experiential Truth revealed through the symbolic order.

Schmemann’s weighty emphasis on the natural sacramental character of nature/the world itself and of human life itself work well within the dialogue with Chauvet and Zizioulas concerning inter-subjectivity and the symbolic order. Schmemann presents the Eucharist in its fullest sense as the celebration of the entire dispensation of God’s redemptive plan for humanity and creation, and the image or pledge of the Kingdom to come263: This notion of the natural sacramentality of creation is Schmemann’s technique for demonstrating the false dichotomy between the natural and supernatural order which, for centuries, has clouded or even hidden the revelation of creation as “very good.”

263 Schmemann, For the Life of the World, 31.
The implications for Eucharistic theology regarding the nature of creation is that Christ’s presence, manifested by the Holy Spirit in and through the ecclesia as the Body of Christ and coupled with the offering of the gifts of bread and wine, becomes for humanity and creation the gift of God’s grace, with grace understood here as indicative of the verve of the Creator. The emphasis on the natural sacramentality of the world—or rather, the sacramental, symbolic structure of the world as sacrament—remains the hallmark of Schmemann’s theology. What is offered here by Schmemann is an alternate theological construct which, according to him, most adequately expresses the worldview of the Patristic writers as well as early Christianity.

In Schmemann’s thought, the holistic vision of the cosmos as redeemed/restored to its truly natural order is accomplished through the οἰκονόμια of God, participating proleptically in its appointed telos. These two considerations offer the understanding of the ecclesia and the sacramental life as constituent of the Church and reflecting the most natural reality posited to the human race. In other words, no supernatural entity or force is imposing on humanity or the cosmos in an attempt to craft nature and humanity to become something other they are according to their true nature. Rather, the cosmos, in being renewed and transfigured by the Holy Spirit, is restored to its original and intended state.

This idea fits with Chauvet’s thought on renewal/transfiguration, specifically in reference to the bread offered in the anaphora: within the Eucharistic celebration, through which bread is “consecrated,” bread becomes most bread, “true bread” in the

264 Cf. Schmemann, Church, World, Mission, 67-84.
ultimate/superlative and sublime sense. Its pneumatological and, perforce, eschatological character becomes evident at this juncture. The invocation on the part of the faithful and the vocation of the Holy Spirit is essentially to “reveal” the natural order in its purest state; the state intended by God from its genesis to its ultimate transfiguration, which is to come. The “very good” uttered by Yahweh still rings true, despite the fallen state of the cosmos. Especially in the light of the Resurrection and the Kingdom to come, this inheritance of creation is certainly made new, yet its newness is not a replacement of the old but its restoration, its transfiguration. Note Schmemann’s theological position regarding the “real presence” in the Eucharistic. The Eucharistic gifts themselves, posited within the entire Eucharistic gesture, the celebration and the matrix of the symbolic order, image forth the πλήρωμα of the Divine Presence.

Considering Schmemann’s insistence on presence as a self-evident reality through the mysteries of the Church, and the dynamics and insights of Chauvet’s presence/absence paradigm, one can make a very strong case for striking similarities between these two theologians. These similarities rest on the crucial necessity of overcoming the traditional scholastic constructs operative within sacramental theology, and the imperative to initiate and reinstate the notion of the symbol/symbolic order as the primary experiential framework for the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. Thus, Chauvet, Schmemann, and Zizioulas converge in a multiplicity of ways on a number of key theological points. These three theologians share a theological horizon in their

---

265 Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 400.

heightened awareness of and emphasis on the notions of inter-subjectivity and the symbolic order. Their emphatic insistence that these two points are crucial to any contemporary and future theological enterprise is evidenced by their keen awareness for the need of a reconstruction of two of the most salient and foundational points operating within the arena of Eucharistic theology. The three, however, share an important remaining focus: the rehabilitation of the person in Eucharistic theological discourse.

The Rehabilitation of the Person as a Free Subject in a Relationship

As noted earlier, a theology of the human person is a crucial issue within the larger domain of contemporary Eucharistic theology. A reading of the main tenets of Chauvet, Schmemann, and Zizioulas, reveals another point of convergence among these thinkers: all three identify a need for the reconstruction/rehabilitation of the notion of personhood within the dynamics of a Eucharistic vision. What is the ultimate Eucharistic question but that of Trinitarian personal relationality and, by God’s initiative and grace, the embracing of the human person in agapic love at the Eucharistic banquet?

The Christian conception of the person as a unique and unrepeatable mystery created in the *imago dei* and taken up into Christ as a participant in the perichoretic love of the Persons of the Trinity is paramount to contemporary Eucharistic theology. Otherwise, Eucharistic theology may be relegated to and remain on the level of philosophical conjecture and existential obscurity; it will be merely an exercise in philosophical/theological polemics and certain *theologoumenon* which, in the end, may

---

267 For insight into the notion of subject within the interplay of Western philosophy and Orthodox thought and referencing Christos Yannaras and John Zizioulas, cf. Ilias Papagiannopoulos, “Re-Appraising the Subject and the Social in Western Philosophy and in Contemporary Orthodox Thought,” *Studies in Eastern European Thought* 58 (2007): 299-330.
contribute nothing at all regarding an understanding of the person as an “ecclesial/catholic” (Zizioulas) person engaged in the mystery of *theosis*, a participant in the Divine nature. The experiential nature of the Eucharist and the whole of Christian worship as attested to by Schmemann are crucial to any authentic theology which, at its summit, reflects a fully incarnational theology.

The many theological issues relating to a theology of the person reveal that the idea of the human person as a relational being lies at the root of Eucharistic theology. If indeed this is the case, as is proposed in this dissertation, then the Eucharistic mystery seen from this vantage point is the sacramental medium of relationality par excellence. Because the Eucharist is the coming into presence (Chauvet) of the Risen Christ within the *ecclesia* through the Divine initiative, each participant in the assembly is offered the invitation to receive the gift of “identity” that is revealed and celebrated within the mystery of the Eucharistic celebration.

In Schmemann’s Eucharistic vision the person is, by virtue of being a creature of God and especially through Christ, a priest of creation. This priestly vocation of the human person not only implies the dynamic of relationality of the human person with the Creator, but also engages each human on all poles of human existence as illustrated by William Thompson’s paradigm of the quaternion structure of human existence. The priestly vesture, as a constituent characteristic of each person, calls for an appreciation of

---


269 Thompson, *The Jesus Debate*, 7-11.
a relational ontology which, within the salvific dispensation of God, manifests and
confirms the existential truth that a person is a free being, a participant in the γνωσις of
God. To reiterate Zizioulas’ point, as cited in chapter 3, the biological person is
transformed, transfigured through the Risen Christ through the mystery of baptism into
an “ecclesial” person, and, freed from the confines of biological, is placed in a
relationship with the Trinitarian God.

At the heart of Zizioulas’ vision lies the deep-seated conviction that, since a
person is created in the image of God, then the subject of freedom becomes a key
component of a sound theological anthropology crafted within the Christian vision.270
Eucharistic theology, expressed in within the framework of eschatology, confirms the
ontological freedom271 that graces humanity as among the most fundamental and
profound iconic images of the saved and transfigured world, a world embraced in the
freedom of agapic love. For Zizioulas, because God by nature is free and not a contingent
being, then life as freedom from finitude and death is offered to every person:

…in order for God to give this freedom from the “given,” Zizioulas argues that
God’s mode of existence, tropos hyparxeos, must itself be free from necessity and
must be freely constituted. This freedom within God’s very being is the condition
for the possibility of the freedom of created existence from the “given” of its own

270  Zizioulas, Lectures in Christian Dogmatics, 26-29, 73-75.

271  Cf. Elizabeth T. Groppe, “Creation Ex Nihilo and Ex Amore: Ontological Freedom in the Theologies of
John Zizioulas and Catherine Mowry Lacugna,” Modern Theology 21, no. 3 (July 2005), 463-496.
nature, and this freedom within God’s being can only be affirmed…through the principle of the monarchy of the Father.\textsuperscript{272}

This perichoretic freedom, enjoyed among the Three Persons of the Trinity, becomes for humanity that saving grace which releases the human from the confines of the biological “given” to that of the relationality most aptly expressed within the life of the \textit{ecclesia}.

Zizioulas’s idea of the ecclesial person, the person of faith, as finding true freedom and true identity through the existential conversation with the “other” accords with Chauvet’s heavy emphasis on the notion that a relationship with the other, whether in reference to God or to other persons, demands a ground of free exchange. As Chauvet asserts, this communication cannot be reduced to an exchange in the economic sense; rather it is a linguistic tool for the possibility of mutuality among persons. This free exchange, operative within the symbolic order, is made possible only by the love and grace of God.

Chauvet contends, in his treatment of the notion of the symbolic/sacramental structure of the Church, that the existential space offered through the symbolic order, serves as the medium through which the various participatory agents become engaged in the language of that structure.\textsuperscript{273} It is here, in this space characterized as freedom, where each person is loved in the embrace of Godly freedom and enjoys the grace of

\begin{footnotes}

\textsuperscript{273} Chauvet, \textit{Symbol and Sacrament}, 162-166.
\end{footnotes}
reciprocity. Freedom in reference to the Eucharistic celebration becomes the “space” for mutuality and the καιρός for a salvation event for those who are engaged in this ecclesial, experiential dialectic. This experiential aspect of Eucharistic presence which will now be the focus of attention within the dialogue at hand.

Presence in Conversation with Experience: The Multidimensional Character of
Presence Operative within a Renewed Vision

All three dialogue partners understand the experiential character of the symbolic order. This experiential character is manifest most clearly within the Eucharistic celebration. For each of these three thinkers, experience is the fundamental key that opens the door to a renewed horizon that expresses the profound, participatory character of the Eucharistic celebration through the world of the symbol.

Chauvet, Schmemann, and Zizioulas are all convicted also of the importance and applicability of the formula, *lex orandi est lex credendi*. The impact of this notable formula cannot be underestimated within this conversation. It is the restoration of a renewed appreciation and understanding of this formula that is called for here, which can thereby lay the essential groundwork for a common theological vision. This quest for a most authentic expression of the faith can be accomplished by a deliberate and thorough theological enterprise. The purpose of this enterprise is to liberate the Eucharistic mystery from the countless explanations and categorizations which have been imposed on it throughout the centuries.

As it stands, this ancient formula of prayer/belief is superior as a vital expression of that which is most characteristic of a holistic theological vision, particularly Eucharistic theology. Why? Because, as alleged by the three dialogue partners, this
formula is indigenous to and expressive of the experiential nature of the Church. It is a formula of balance and integrity, not born solely of intellectualization, but of faith, witness, and conviction. There is no need to employ any constructs alien to the personal experience of the Risen Lord as a lived reality through the medium of the symbolic order.

For Chauvet, Schmemann, and Zizioulas, the symbolic order is the most natural experiential medium through which God dwells among his people. The symptoms of the bifurcation or chasm that has occurred between prayer and belief set the stage for the disintegration of the natural state of order and integrity which served to maintain, in the most authentic state, a state of the theological efficacy and integrity characteristic of the Patristic era. Prayer and belief are not two distinct elements joined together by some theological system or construct. On the contrary, these two elements are reciprocal by nature, each reinforcing the other as the most natural expression of the Christian liturgical experience. Prayer and belief are not abstractions, isolates within a particular genre of theological discussion, but are certainties that unmistakably reflect an experiential relationality. Prayer and belief, then, arising out of this experiential relation as experienced in the symbolic order within the ecclesial assembly give rise to theological constructs, and not the other way around.

As noted earlier, the Patristic view of the presence of the Risen Christ through Eucharistic symbolization is pluriform in nature. From the Fathers, one may derive that a multiplicity of venues can serve as media confirming an experience of Christ’s presence within the Eucharistic celebration. Christians arrive at their conviction of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist in a variety of ways that include psychological, sociological, and phenomenological experiences along with a plethora of other experiential modes.
The symbolic order, however, and all that it implies, transcends any of these categories as it engages the human in the mystery as revealed and celebrated in the light of the Eucharistic presence of Christ. The experience of the ecclesia is such that all of the faithful gathered as the Body of Christ are transfigured through the power of the Holy Spirit. The mystery of the symbolic, the Body and Blood of Christ is a given, a given as a gift from above. Such an engagement of humanity and the cosmos comes from the initiative of the “Other,” the Ἅγιος.

In sum, a crucial point emerging from these three theologians concerns the experiential/relational aspects of presence, which embodies the inherent relationship between the theoria and praxis of the Catholic faith characteristic of the Apostolic Church found in her worship.

Thus far I have looked at the great convergence of thought and theological vision among Chauvet, Schmemann, and Zizioulas, pointing out the common terrain on which these theologians map out their respective theologies. That common terrain is the foundational notion of Eucharistic presence within the sacramental/symbolic order. These points of convergence seem extraordinary, appearing as they do at an axial moment in the Church’s history. Differences remain, of course, both among the three theologians and between them and outside critics.

Chauvet’s and Zizioulas’s expositions of their theologies are deeply analytical and critical in nature, interwoven with the complexities of the theological, philosophical, and scientific worlds. Both theologians delve into this multi-disciplinary dialogue
unreservedly. Schmemann’s theological approach is often more pastoral in nature,\textsuperscript{274} though Chauvet\textsuperscript{275} and Zizioulas do address theology within a pastoral context.

Schmemann, however, has a different emphasis: more liturgical,\textsuperscript{276} pastoral, devotional, though not lacking in the intellectual.

As a liturgist, Schmemann derives his strength from his notion of the experiential, as the \textit{homo adorans}\textsuperscript{277} of which he speaks of in his writings. Some thinkers have lodged criticisms against Schmemann’s writings as being too esoteric, not clear and systematic enough to justify his positions. Also, called into question are some of the salient points offered by Schmemann which are characteristic of his theological vision, namely: the question of the principle of \textit{lex orandi lex credendi} as being a critical and effective formula for contemporary theology, the liturgy as \textit{the} starting point of sacramental theology and the supposed synthesis of theology and worship which existed in the early church and Patrisitic period.\textsuperscript{278} Schmemann was not a systematic writer, at least not in the traditional sense of the word; nevertheless, his insights into the liturgical life of the


\textsuperscript{277} Schmemann, \textit{For the Life of the World}, 15.

Church remain quite extraordinary, based on the experiential nature of liturgical prayer.²⁷⁹

Nor have these authors failed to come under criticism in terms of some of the ideas presented here. Bernard Blankenhorn, in looking at Chauvet’s ideas on Thomas Aquinas’s Eucharistic theology, finds Chauvet to be “opposing what is perhaps the best theological expression of a doctrine that appears to be quite central to Catholicism, that is, the belief that the sacraments cause grace” and says that “Chauvet’s critique of Aquinas inevitably targets patristic sacramentology.”²⁸⁰ Blankenhorn finds some truth to Chauvet’s objection of grace as being objectified or reified in Aquinas’a approach: “A brief reflection on the widespread phenomena of aggressive parents who insist that their nonpracticing Catholic teenage children should be allowed to receive the sacrament of confirmation suggests that Chauvet’s description of the misapprehension of grace may not be far from the unconscious theology of numerous Catholics.”²⁸¹ Nonetheless, Blankenhorn believes that Chauvet has overlooked a development in Aquinas’s doctrine arising from his study of Christology according to the Greek Fathers: “Properly speaking, God creates beings, things, or objects, not modes of being or forms. Thomas’s new doctrine therefore emphasizes that grace is neither a thing nor a being nor an object.


²⁸¹ Ibid., 258.
Chauvet recognizes the shift in Thomas’s thinking on grace, but he seems to miss these implications.\(^{282}\)

Finally, though, in line with the emphasis in this dissertation, Blankenhorn concludes that

[w]hile Chauvet’s critique suffers from a misreading of Aquinas, the French theologian’s creative work also has an important positive lesson for us. Chauvet insists that sacramental theology’s fundamental principle should be to begin its reflection with the act of the liturgical celebration itself. What he implies is that one should not begin with a definition of the sacraments, but instead opt for a phenomenological approach, much as Heidegger did with regard to being. I would propose that Chauvet’s method could bear great fruit. … I would suggest that many of Chauvet’s creative insights on sacramental symbolism and efficacy could be integrated into Aquinas’s vision of sacramental causality…. I see no reason to exclude the symbolization and realization of the existential transformations that Chauvet proposes as secondary elements of the sacraments of the new law, for they can share in the analogous unity of sacramental signification and efficacy that Aquinas himself has laid out.\(^{283}\)

Zizioulas has also come in for his share of criticism, especially from Lucian Turcescu.\(^{284}\) Turcescu maintains, among other things, that Zizioulas is mistaken in his

\(^{282}\) Ibid., 270.

\(^{283}\) Ibid., 292.
attempt to distinguish between the *person* and the *individual*. The Greek notion of person, according to Zizioulas, has been held captive within a philosophical construct which could proceed no further than that of a biological hypostasis. As noted earlier, Zizioulas champions the view that the Cappadocian Fathers wrested the static ontology of the person characteristic of this Hellenistic world view, and thrust the notion of person in a new trajectory and context, i.e., that of *relationality* in and through the mystery of Baptism and the salvific life accorded to each person by way of Jesus Christ through the Church.

Turcescu emphatically disagrees with Zizioulas’ notion of the individual, or individualism, as that which indicates a closed ontology of personhood radically differentiated from an ontology of freedom in relationality. Turcescu writes:

A person, [Zizioulas] tells us, should not be understood as an individual, because in our times individualism has acquired some negative connotations: first, individualism leads to isolation of humans from other humans and, second, it leads to isolation of humans from the rest of creation, and thus to ecological disasters. Instead, a person should be generous, friendly, and open to others. A person should be communitarian and relational.  

---


286 Ibid., 527.
Tercescu not only takes issue with Zizioulas’ “misreading of Gregory of Nyssa and the other Cappadocian Fathers,” but also dismisses Zizioulas’ theological enterprise as a whole, alleging that Zizioulas has ultimately projected his theology onto that of the Fathers, misrepresenting their theological base in order to accommodate his own crafting of a theology that will fit within the contemporary mind set.287

In terms of our discussion at hand, I offer the following observations of the work of Chauvet, Schmemann, and Zizioulas. Chauvet has, in his own right, presented a systematic structure of Eucharistic theology that resonates with the strides being made in sacramental theology in conversation with the contemporary sciences. The levels of his scholarship are quite extraordinary: Chauvet is able to synthesize a multiplicity of disciplines in order to present a coherent and convincing argument for his theological positions. In addition, Chauvet has made a significant impact within the larger arena of Eucharistic scholarship as is evidenced by the growing number of books, articles, dissertations, etc. which attest to his contribution to contemporary theological dialogue.

One concern may be raised with Chauvet’s work, as well as that of other contemporary theologians, in their use of philosophical writers and their respective systems to articulate theological positions. The trend in theology, both past and present, has been to engage in philosophical discourse as a methodological tool in doing theology.

Certainly, this approach can validate foundational theological tenets which, if left to mere religious speculation, could suffer a certain compromise in their efficacy in remaining meaningful and operative within the human condition and experience. On the other hand, such an approach, as academic as it is, may be too limited in its scope to encompass the human experiential need for self-identity in relationality. Academicians must pose the question: to whom and for whom are we writing and to what end? I believe that Chauvet has maintained balance in his approach: he is keenly aware of his audience, and one of the keys to his theological success is his ability to work within the worlds of philosophy and the sciences without limiting his theological vision to these realms of scholarship. His articulation of the notions of the other, mystery and transcendence, presence, absence, etc., is indicative of his conviction that faith must be present. Chauvet has given much consideration and scholarship to the pastoral component of his work. One of his enduring strengths is his awareness of the needs of the people of God and of all humans in their quest for identity and integrity in a fallen world.

Zizioulas, likewise, has been and continues to be a formidable voice in contemporary theological discourse, especially via his existential approach and methodology in presenting his position of personhood and relationality. Zizioulas is not so dependent as Chauvet on current philosophical systems to justify his theological positions, invoking more frequently the scriptural, liturgical and patristic sources which serve as the base of his theological endeavors. However, he remains similar to Chauvet in his willingness and ability to engage in contemporary philosophical scholarship, which is to his credit. Some Orthodox theologians, and by no means all, have shied away from articulating theology through the medium of scientific discourse. Zizioulas cannot be
numbered among those thinkers because of his expertise and knowledge of the Hellenistic philosophical as well as modern systems of thought, and he does implement these periodically. One of the key strengths of Zizioulas’ vision is his knowledge of the existential condition of the human which, in light of the Adamic fall, needs to be restored to full integrity, as evidenced in his works referenced this dissertation. Zizioulas may be prey to the criticism that, in his attempt to wrest the concept of the human person and relationality from the clutches of categorization, he has fallen into the trap of doing the very thing he is trying to avoid. I think that this criticism, if truly warranted, may be attributed to methodology and not to lack of theological integrity.

Schmemann remains a theologian of great repute, especially in terms of Eucharistic theology. His works in liturgical theology have become a metric for sacramental scholarship. Relying heavily on the liturgical tradition of the Church, Schmemann has aided, with other theologians both East and West, in setting a new course for the exploration of the idea of a more authentic and meaningful renewal in liturgical theology. Schmemann has vigorously defended need for a return to the indigenous language and experience of Christianity as rooted in the scriptural and patristic traditions, calling for liturgical reform on a variety of levels which he believed would help reshape the contours of liturgical practices that had become obscured over the centuries. Despite his efforts, one might ask if Schmemann’s theology has truly made a difference in the liturgical and theological vision of the Church, especially within the Orthodox Church? Does his appeal for a call to a more Eucharistic vision enable the faithful today to come to a greater awareness of their relationship to God through the Eucharistic celebration? Or, has Schmemann’s theological contribution, as great as it is,
been relegated to the category of academic theology, the very thing that Schmemann tried to free the church’s theology from? I believe that, like those of Chauvet and Zizioulas, Schmemann’s contribution and vision are promoting a renewal of Eucharistic awareness on many levels, as his works broadly appeal to scholars and academicians. It is, perhaps, too soon to tell if Schmemann’s theology has had any significant practical effect on the liturgical life of parishes and whether or not it would have been more advantageous for Schmemann to refer more to the contemporary sciences in order to present a more formidable argument for his positions.

Renewing the Eucharistic Vision

From these theologians then, we have derived a new vision or horizon relative to theologies of the Eucharist emerging today in the ecumenical arena. Is the new horizon proposed by these theologians, however, really a new vision? Or is it their intention and conviction that what is truly needed in contemporary theological discourse is not a discovery of the new but rather a need to recapture anew the vision of the Patristic era and that of the early Church? It is surely one matter to create a new vision; it is quite another matter to see the vision anew.

The Eucharistic vision, the “Eucharistic consciousness” of the Churches has not been lost. All three theologians in this conversation attest that the vision is truly preserved and truly alive, that it is as efficacious as ever, and that it is made evident in the prayer/belief dynamic of the Church’s sacramental celebrations. The various attempts undertaken by theologians and thinkers to return to the Patristic mind, φρόνημα, should not be understood in a static sense of a rote repetition of the formulae, constructs, verbiage, etc., employed by those early Fathers. That approach would only serve to limit
the deep and broad “symbolic language” characteristic of the sacramental order of the Church. This sacramental order evokes the immeasurable and profound mystery of our encounter(s) with the divine, the transcendent. Consequently, such an approach would only lead to a “parroting” of images and terms taken out of the broader context of a multi-dimensional, multi-faceted experiential linguistic. In addition, such a repetition of the language of the Fathers will be relegated once again to the categories of proof texts and the explainable, divorced from their experiential core within the larger framework of worship.

A United Witness for Postmodern Humanity

What is it about the Eucharistic vision, as presented in this dissertation, which can serve not only as a paradigmatic tool for witnessing Christ to postmodern humanity but as the sublime expression of “humanity in union” par excellence? And what type of unity are we addressing here? First, we should understand that the contemporary human condition is not very different from what it has been throughout world history. The fragmentation of the human person on an inter-personal, as well as intra-personal, level has plagued every human since Adam fell. Yet, the church has never acquiesced to the givenness of human suffering and oppression, but rather its mission has been and will remain radiating and incarnating Christ’s love and healing to all peoples at all times. It is, after all, God’s desire that humanity accept his embrace of love as this is evidenced through the incarnation of his Son and the gift of the Church.

Yet, the unique dilemma of contemporary humanity is its critical and destructive objectification, the eradication of the notion of personhood. This demise of personhood means the objectification and subsequent degradation of the human to an economic value,
a thing, a pawn in a bigger game. Such eradication of the sense of person is clearly manifested in a multitude of ways in our contemporary culture. For example, it is disturbingly obvious that in the arenas of abortion, sexual slavery and slavery in all of its forms, human trafficking, pornography, etc., the image of the person as brought into existence by God in order to be loved, appears to be all but completely missing in our social constructs. Within the wide spectrum of human conception and death, the notion of the “person” has been reduced to classifying that which is in the womb as “products of conception,” and to that which is in the grave as a castoff body or shell, no longer serving any real purpose. The devolution of the notion of personhood is now couched in the language of the “what” and not of the “whom.” It is “what” is in the womb and “what” is in the grave; this type of language bespeaks a utilitarian worldview in which the human person is reduced to that of an “hypostasis of biological existence.”

Thus, the human person is assigned to that biological category of existence ad infinitum by those who hold such a view of themselves and to those who believe that they have the power to place other humans within that closed category.

The contemporary world urgently needs to rediscover the dignity of the human person, as is evidenced profoundly in the works of John Paul II and the interlocutors within this dialogue. All four men call for an imperative that restores the dignity of the human person as a relational being embraced by the agapic love of God. This concept seems the most critical issue for today’s Eucharistic theology in this sense: all theological development and conjecture remains quite meaningless unless its main and only purpose

---

288 Zizioulas, Being as Communion, 50.
is to reveal, not only a way of thinking, but the way of theosis: humanity’s gift offered by the Trinitarian God. Any Eucharistic theology, or any theological enterprise for that matter, that is lacking and devoid of the God–human embrace, remains merely an exercise of intellectualization outside of the parameters of a true incarnational theology. This notion of incarnational theology is by nature a theology of persons, calling for a shift from speculation and abstraction to the reality of the incarnate and risen Christ. True incarnational theology affects every aspect of human existence, and this theology is manifest most fully in a Eucharistic worldview. Far from being a simple repetition of liturgical rites, words, and gestures, as ancient and venerable as they are, the liturgy is an encounter par excellence. Through the witness and mission of the Church, humans may experience this sacramental encounter, imaged as a nuptial relationship in both the Old and New covenants. The theologies of Zizioulas and John Paul II also converge and remain complementary on the issue of personal integrity and the mystery of encounter.

Via this discussion and common view on personhood, certain developments have begun to emerge concerning a reconfiguration of the ontology (ies) of personhood. The decline of the dignity of the human person, referred to by John Paul II as the “culture of death,” constitutes a large part of the responsibility of current and future theologians. This responsibility includes engaging the world in a dialogue based on the veracity of the incalculable worth of each human being from the time of conception on. This task can be addressed in terms of a Eucharistic theology of presence because it is the very presence and embrace of the Risen Christ which remains the hope of humanity, in and through the

---

ecclesial Body of Christ, the Church. It is precisely this language of person and community that can serve as a new corrective to the human condition on many levels because this language is desperately needed in the contemporary world. The Eucharist provides the interactive εθος (ethos) that reflects the perichoretic character of personhood as relationality.²⁹⁰ This personal and relational dynamic, especially as presented by Zizioulas, could also be helpful in the ecumenical dialogue with the various Protestant traditions. A hallmark of the Protestant/Evangelical communities is the importance placed on the necessity of a “personal relationship” with Jesus Christ. Perhaps this personal/inter-subjective paradigm could prove most helpful in revealing the Eucharist as celebrated in the East and West as the apex of the celebration of personal relationship in its ultimate sense. This idea of communal relationality also addresses the radical individualism that has overtaken Western civilization—and which is implied, to some extent in the Protestant idea of a “personal” (that is, one-on-one, without such “unnecessary” intermediaries as the Church) relationship with Christ.

In addition to the language of relationality and of personhood, the language of symbol is also particularly suited to our postmodern age. The broader symbolic language of the Eucharistic celebration engages humans on a primordial existential level—for which they hunger and which was for a time, in the wake of the scientific and industrial

²⁹⁰ A case in point is the enduring character relative to the Eucharistic celebration as presented in the East and West. While both traditions hold to a common, basic structure of the Eucharistic celebration, with variances within and between each tradition, the liturgy for over two millennia has engaged and continues to engage humanity on countless experiential levels. I would be hard-pressed to see this enduring character of Eucharistic celebration relegated to a purely social, anthropological phenomenon in that, first and foremost, it is the conviction of the church that the Eucharist is a gift from the Divine and not a human-generated/perpetuated social entity. The strong pneumatological and eschatological character of the Eucharist, in primitive Christianity as well as a rediscovery of these characteristics in contemporary theological scholarship, is evidentiary of the fact that the source of the Eucharist is “from above.”
revolutions, largely lost. It is the evocative language of the Eucharistic rite that
communicates the notions of relationality and personal identity, the axial principles
around which this dissertation hinges. The eucharistic celebration, via the symbolic
order, mediates God’s living presence through a multiplicity of images, sights, sounds
etc.; it addresses the whole person, inviting participants once again to understand the
symbol as not mere representation but rather as something that hides a much deeper
reality. Thus, one is invited to experience a sense of wonder and reciprocity relative to
the “other/God/fellow humans” as well as one’s self. This Eucharistic domain can serve
as a window of opportunity (καιρός/kairos) for humans to journey on the vast planes of
existential relationality by grace, in the very life of the Trinity.

The evocative nature of the symbol/symbolic engages humans within their
deepest recesses. We are made for the symbolic, because it is through the symbol that we
can dimly behold the glory of God—fallen as we are, we may not directly behold his
glory. Thus, engagement with the symbolic provides an opportunity for persons to
participate in the life of God, of Being, which elevates that which appears mundane or,
better yet, allows the mundane to be seen and experienced as that which is most
extraordinary and wondrous. A piece of bread, a cup of wine—these are the Body and
Blood of the risen Savior. This genre of “transformative” language, which reveals the
imminence and transcendence of the Divine, lies at the heart of human experience and
serves as a common primordial thread which runs through a variety of religious
convictions and experiences. Furthermore, I believe that this new language can serve as a
spring board for the creation and discovery of new horizons in Eucharistic theology. The
linguistic frameworks with which we are accustomed based primarily on rationality, metaphysics, etc., need to give way to the language of reciprocity and koinonia.

Post-modern man has been uniquely prepared to receive this language of Eucharistic worship, in both East and West through the rise of such authors as J.R.R. Tolkien, who has once again opened the mind of modern man to realities beyond that which can be seen and handled. Thus, language that reflects the symbolic order is highly likely to prove to be a more effective communicative medium in the postmodern age than the static language of scholasticism and metaphysics.

What, therefore, can a Eucharistic vision of the Christian faith and practice offer modern humanity? It offers the spectacle of broken humanity gathered in unity within the embrace of God, celebrating at the same table and eating and drinking from the common cup. This image, manifested in the works and deeds of the faithful, can only serve as a greater witness of unity among Christians themselves and an iconic image of salvation to humanity. This image, exalted as it is, remains only an invitation. Some Christians will have various objection to this unity via a shared Eucharistic vision, and to those “outside” of the household of faith, the concept is more or less meaningless. It is true that Christians can manifest their unity via countless venues and in a variety of ministries throughout the world. It is critical, however, that we Christians strive to be faithful to Christ in his desire that the church serve as a united witness, reflecting his relationship with his Father and within the mystery of the Trinity. The various divisions within the Christian world are truly an aberration of the worst kind and an affront to God, who desires that we all may be one (cf. John 17).
The Shape of a Future Theology of Presence

The questions and expressions of presence have morphed over the centuries into a very sophisticated linguistic genre of Eucharistic theology which can serve as an impetus for contemporary and future Eucharistic theological development. The questions and implications of presence remain and have been taken up by both contemporary theologians and philosophers working within varying academic disciplines. Perhaps one of the most valuable contributions within the development of Eucharistic theologies relative to the Catholic and Orthodox perspectives, are those of Henri de Lubac and John Zizioulas.291 Their mutual conviction that the “Church makes the Eucharist and the Eucharist makes the Church,” can surely serve as a paradigm for the ongoing conversation within Eucharistic theology for both the East and the West as well as other thinkers who are prone to explore the Eucharistic consciousness and identity of the Church as a sacrament of Presence.

What the shape theological concepts of the Eucharistic presence will take in the future is, of course, conjecture. The primary emphasis, at least in this dissertation, on the notions of personhood and relationality based on the theological vision of Trinitarian life, it is to be hoped, will remain one of the central components of future theological development. In line with this thought, as Schmemann has pointed out, the Fathers of the Church were not isolated individuals who remained above the fray of the human condition and particularly those faithful assembled as the ecclesia of God. These Fathers

were shepherds of their flocks, many of them laying down their lives for those placed under their care. Their theological convictions were born out of ecclesial experience and framed within the prayer life of the Church.

The Fathers responded to the societal demands of their age, as can be clearly seen in their theological posture that expresses a true incarnational theology. Likewise, Chauvet and Zizioulas both have an essentially pastoral approach to their theology. Both of these authors clearly stress the pastoral dimension of the Eucharist for, once again, if these theologies do not reflect at their core the personal dimension of the Church, then one runs the risk of creating a structure of mere institutionalism.

Eucharistic theology is, and will always be, compelled to address the ultimate questions regarding God and humanity. In this theological endeavor, God and humanity cannot be relegated to the universe of abstractions. Perhaps it can be said that the restoration and joyful acceptance of a Eucharistic vision of life can, as it has done for centuries, can continue to provide the locus for the meeting between God and humanity and, as such, reveal the hope that is within us. The beauty of Eucharistic theology is that by its very nature, when worked and presented within the primordial language characteristic of a holistic vision of the saving dispensation of God, becomes the existential medium for a true vision of reality as seen through the eyes of God.

Concluding Thoughts: The Shape of the Reconciliation of the Churches via a Common Eucharistic Vision

In his reply to the Delegation from the Ecumenical Patriarchate dated June 30, 1983, John Paul II offered these words:
On this day when we keep up the feast of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, the presence of a delegation from our sister Church of Constantinople gives us added reason to be glad. I should like to tell you how really grateful I am that you are here. This recent tradition of celebrating together Saints Peter and Paul at Rome, and Peter’s brother Andrew at the Ecumenical Patriarchate, to some extent fills the gap created by the incomplete communion between our Churches. It does so by the desire it expresses and the hope it stirs of reaching the day when we are finally able to celebrate the Eucharist together, like faithful disciples around their one Lord. By sharing each in turn in the feast of the Apostles, we are both expressly committing ourselves to prepare in unity and charity for the Supper-in-communion which the Lord wants us to celebrate as a memorial of his death and Resurrection, and as a pledge of eternal life.²⁹²

In this message of John Paul II, one can take notice of the deep desire that the Pontiff had for the eventual union of the Churches, which continues today in the work and thought of Benedict XVI. In tandem with the ideologies presented in this work, the center-piece or operative phrase of the above quote is that of “the Supper-in-communion” imagery invoked by John Paul II. He knew well, as do many contemporary theologians, that the Eucharistic table is the table of life and unity in the Risen Lord. The desire to eat and drink from the one bread and the one cup united in the one Lord remains the profoundly fundamental desire common to believers of both traditions. Perhaps this

desire will be fulfilled in the future within the economic dispensation of God. Desire is not the only step of the many that must be taken toward union, but it remains the very condition that most reflects the Lord himself and his followers by participating in that which is good and well pleasing to God.

The question remains, until full canonical communion is established between the two churches, what can be accomplished on the road to unity? In the recent past, a certain phrase of unknown origin has become somewhat popular in Orthodox circles: “the liturgy after the Liturgy.” This phrase arose out of a sense of need on the part of some Orthodox to assess and evaluate the church’s Eucharistic ethos in terms and in light of practical and pastoral considerations: once the liturgy has been celebrated on any given Sunday, how and in what ways do the faithful manifest the fruits of that Eucharistic encounter? The liturgical/Eucharistic encounter must continue throughout the week in ways which reflect an encounter between God, humanity in general, and each member of the church in particular. Perhaps real union between local Orthodox and Catholic communities can begin with this working out of the Eucharistic encounter through venues such as works of mercy and charity, helping the poor and the infirm, engaging in philanthropic works, joining together in simple common prayer, evaluating those areas of pastoral ministry that already exist within each tradition, and beginning to form cooperatives in order to mutually benefit each community and the communities at large. Such a “grass roots” approach, in the spirit of the broader Eucharistic vision already shared by both traditions, could serve as common ground for union. I believe that there remains a moral imperative for such cooperation for the sake of the Churches’ common witness in this current time in history and a legacy for future generations.
Reflecting on some of the insights of Chauvet, Schmemann, and Zizioulas regarding their theologies of the Eucharist, one might inquire; to what degree, if any, can their contributions have an effect in the relations between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches? Can a common Eucharistic vision, taking into consideration the variety, complexities, and fluidity within that vision, serve as a springboard for future theological development and ultimate consensus? To such questions, I would answer: ultimately, it will be only the common Eucharistic vision that will serve as a springboard for dialogue toward unity, and will remain the very content and expression of that unity.

As noted earlier, for some thinkers, sharing at the Eucharistic table cannot take place until full unity is reached on all doctrinal and ecclesiological issues. However, there are those who maintain that the theological unity as it stands today between the Catholic and Orthodox Church is so close on so many levels, that the practice of Eucharistic communion need not be postponed until all issues are resolved. What, after all, are those issues that still need resolved? I believe that two salient points stand out as the two essential issues that need to be resolved in the quest for union. First of all, it should be noted that strides are being made in contemporary ecclesiological scholarship among theologians both East and West that evidence a desire for an ecclesiology that is much more conciliar in nature. We see this evidenced in the work of Vatican II, which proposed that the image of the church be seen in more conciliar terms rather than according to a pyramidal model. In light of these developments, the meaning and role of the papacy needs to be clarified and re-evaluated within the Catholic Church,

especially in light of “eucharistic or communion ecclesiology,” which seems to be the primary paradigm operative for bringing about a united church. Specifically, the issues of papal universal jurisdiction and papal infallibility need to be clarified, especially as operating principles within a proposed structure of a “conciliar ecclesiology” which is more characteristic of the East. As to the Orthodox, a more in-depth study and clarification are needed the role of the Ecumenical Patriarch, and all patriarchs for that matter, in the contemporary Orthodox world and within the context of a united church. Along these lines, the ecclesial concept of primus inter pares also calls for clarification in both the Catholic and Orthodox ecclesiological lectionary as to what this term means relative to the jurisdiction of prelates within a united church. I contend that these two issues are the primary ones needing further thought and clarification. A welcome sign is that these issues are being addressed in the ongoing dialogue between and among the various churches. A case in point is the creative work of Pope Benedict XVI in which he implemented a new ecclesiological paradigm, the personal ordinariate, whereby members of Anglican bodies may be reunited to Rome. Such a move on the part of the Pope, while in content and theory may prove beneficial to Catholic/Anglican


relations, will not apply to Catholic/Orthodox relations and hope for eventual reunion—the situations are too widely different for similar measures to apply. Nevertheless, this creative initiative of the Pontiff should be recognized by all Christians as a sign of his willingness to bring about union in the most practical of terms while maintaining the integrity of the catholic faith. Thus, although this model is not *apropos* as an operative principle for the Orthodox, there is no doubt room for similar operative models yet to be explored by both Churches.

The need remains for a consensus of faith as a prior condition to any shared Eucharistic celebration. This is made clear in the continuing work of “The North American Orthodox – Catholic Theological Consultation” which convenes regularly for dialogue. The consultants engaged on this level of conversation, which in itself is a blessing, are fully aware of the theological issues which remain yet to be resolved. Also, one can extrapolate from the resultant documents of their work that participants understand the extreme importance of the dogmatic issues being addressed. It was the position taken by John Paul II, as well as the present pope Benedict XVI, whereby both pontiffs emphasize the crucial importance for maintaining the integrity of the deposit of faith without compromising the dogma of revealed Truth. At the same time, it is important to note that the theological truths of the church can be expressed in a plurality of ways, much in the same vein as the issue of Eucharistic presence. This plurality does not mean that theological truths should be relegated to pure relativity and subjectivity, but

297 The Orthodox-Catholic Consultation was initiated in 1995 and has put forth a number of statements wherein certain levels of agreement have been established on a variety of topic pertinent to seeking unity. For the texts of these statements, see [http://www.scoba.us/resources/orthodox-catholic.html](http://www.scoba.us/resources/orthodox-catholic.html).
rather that the methodology for conveying the truths might be adjusted for speaking to the experiential core of the contemporary/post-modern world. The Eucharistic theologies of Chauvet, Schmemann, and Zizioulas have done just that: they have offered a common language, a variety of dialogical tools, for both Churches.

Ultimately, the Eucharist is the Lord’s Table and we are his invited guests. It is around his table, and exclusively his Table, that every human person can find his true identity and home as a child of God. The quest for unity among the churches can best be served by rediscovering the Eucharistic ethos—with all that it implies—that is the all-encompassing framework for Christian celebration and identity. We must ask the question, “If not the Eucharist as remedy, then what?” I contend that the sacramental and ecclesial issues that remain to be resolved find their ultimate meaning and resolution in the theologies of Eucharistic celebration. The challenge remaining for both traditions is to exhibit a willingness to delve into those things that are most common in the Eucharistic ethos already shared by both traditions, use those commonalities to articulate a common witness to each other and the world, and humbly and bravely submit to one another in the greater service to our Lord. No matter where our journey takes us in resolving the issues faced by both Churches in our contemporary world, in one way or another, I believe that we will run full-circle to the Eucharist.

“O Christ, great and most holy Pascha; O Wisdom, Word and Power of God: Grant that we may more perfectly partake of thee in the never-ending day of thy Kingdom.”

Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom
BIBLIOGRAPHY

“Address by Metropolitan Gennadios to the 3rd Catholic-Orthodox Forum: ‘The Unity we All Seek is a Gift From Above.’” Lisbon, Portugal. June 6, 2012. 


_____. “The Eucharist: The Principal Link Between the Catholics and the Orthodox.” in Tradition Alive, 49.


Translated and edited by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 1920.


(accessed September 15, 2012).

Aune, Michael Bjerknes. “Liturgy and Theology: Rethinking the Relationship.”


———. *The Eucharist in the West: History and Theology*. Robert J. Daly, editor.


Plekon, Michael. “The Church, the Eucharist and the Kingdom: Towards an Assessment of Alexander Schmemann’s Theological Legacy.” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (1996): 143.


Additional Sources Consulted and References for Further Reading

Louis-Marie Chauvet


———.“La Dimension Sacrificielle de l’eucharistie.” La Maison-Dieu 123 (1975).


——.“La ritualité chrétienne dans le cercle du symbole.” La Maison-Dieu 133 (1978).


——.“Le sacramentologue aux prises avec l’euchariste.” La Maison-Dieu 137 (1979).

——."Le sacrifice de la messe.” Lumiere et Vie 146 (1980).


Alexander Schmemann

Schmemann, Alexander. "Byzantine Theocracy and the Orthodox Church." St. Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly 1, no. 2 (1953): 5–22.


——. *Clergy and Laity in the Orthodox Church*. St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1967.


———. “Worship in a Secular Age.” *St. Vladimir’s Seminary Quarterly* 16, no. 1 (1972): 3-16.
John D. Zizioulas


