

Rescuing History from Historicism: The Eucharistic Unity of History

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In this previously unpublished essay from March, 2003, Donald Keefe argues for the recovery in biblical exegesis of the patristic and medieval appreciation for the multivalence of scripture, which was understood as having four senses: the literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogic. These four senses were taken as comprising a single, integrated whole. The founding of the other three senses on the literal, however, meant that all were taken as being historical, as having objective meaning. Thus, history itself was understood as multivalent, for the integrating ground of history was said to be Christ, whose Eucharistic, liturgical presence—worship providing the one context within which the scriptures can be fully understood—unites, discloses, and fulfills the substance and meaning of history.

Introduction: The Catholic Faith in the Lord of History

The Catholic commitment to the theology of history has its foundation in the solemnly defined historicity of the Church's Eucharistic worship: The faith that Jesus is the Lord affirms that his redemptive exercise of Lordship on the Cross is effectively mediated by its liturgical and sacramental representation in the sacrifice of the Mass. In short, it is the faith of the Church that the Eucharistic One Sacrifice is the same historical event as the Sacrifice offered on the Cross by Jesus, the eternal Son of the eternal Father, and the Son of Mary, one and the same. Any historical consciousness, any critical historical method, which does not affirm the objective historicity of this prime Event, i.e., of the Christ's Eucharistic Lordship of history, is false to the faith and cannot serve a Catholic interest.¹

¹ The Eucharistic foundation of Jesus' Lordship of history is further developed in "Eucharistic Affirmations," *The Catholic World Report* (June, 1999), from which the following is excerpted:

There is no speculative middle or neutral ground available for disinterested occupation by the uncommitted academic ethicist or moralist. Either it is by Jesus the Christ's institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper that his One Sacrifice transcends history, or history is not transcended, and can only proceed entropically, to nullify all that is historical. Apart from that Eucharistic Institution, every concrete historical entity is inescapably committed to fragmentation and to necessity, to what the Catholic tradition, following the Old Testament, has named flesh (*sarx*), i.e., the merely pragmatic realm of necessary fragmentation and consequent futility, finally to be lost in the obscurity and dissolution that is death, the very sign of "fleshly" or sarkic existence. In such circumstances, one cannot affirm that Jesus is the Lord: in fact, his name vanishes from history: this final product of liberal Protestantism's "higher criticism" was announced in the nineteenth century.

To repeat: there is no other free, intelligible order in history than that which is grounded in the free unity of the Eucharistic One Flesh, and none has ever been proposed. The gift of this free unity is the work of the Christ the Head which Paul designated a "recapitulation," the restoration, by the Head, of the free unity freely rejected in the Original Sin which, in the Beginning, caused the fall of man and man's universe. Recapitulation is the Gift of the Spirit by the Head to his bridal Church; it is a Gift of freedom, freely to be appropriated through participation in the sacramental worship of the Church, whose free historicity integrates into its communion the entirety of historical humanity, for all of whom Christ died.

The Catholic faith in the Lordship of Jesus over history is therefore integral to the Eucharistic worship of the historical Church, simply because his Lordship is radically Eucharistic. This is to say that it is by his Eucharistic immanence in history as Priest and as Victim that Jesus is Lord, the Lord of history. It is to say that the risen Jesus transcends history and the world *precisely as the Eucharistic Lord*, from within history and the world.

This means that Jesus the Christ's Lordship is equivalent to his Headship of his bridal Church, which Headship is Eucharistic: only there is he present to the Church as her Lord. In his High Priestly offering of the One Sacrifice, he recapitulates the fallen Good Creation by restoring its truth and goodness *in sacramento*. This cause of the restoration of the truth and unity, and therefore the goodness, of creation is the free unity of the One Flesh of the New Covenant.

Jesus's Lordship over history is historically actual and effective in its Eucharistic representation, and not otherwise, because it is only by that sacramental, transhistorical representation that his institution of the New Covenant from the Cross redeems the fallen history of the fallen world; apart from his proleptic institution of the Eucharist, the Cross would be merely an event like other events, and so would move inexorably into the past. Therefore it is only as Eucharistically represented on the altars of the Church that Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega: only thus is he transcendent to history and to the world, at once the Beginning and the End of history and so of the Good Creation which is good only by his nuptially-ordered presence within it as the second Adam, One Flesh with the second Eve.

The Eucharistic anamnesis of the One Sacrifice is therefore the sacramental representation of the Prime Event, the sacrificial institution of the New Covenant, which makes history to be salvific, and to be intelligible only as salvific. It must follow that the objective truth and intelligibility, the intrinsic meaning, the salvific significance, of history is also sacramental.

That is to say that history has the free intelligibility of a sacramental sign:² this is the direct implication of the sacramental historicity of the Eucharistic sacrifice, for it is from this that history derives its salvific significance. Consequently, the Catholic affirmation of the Lordship of Jesus in the sacrifice of the Mass requires that history be a theological category. No other understanding of history will suffice for Catholic theology, which includes the exegesis of the Church's Scriptures.

See also "The Reality of the Real Presence," *Adoremus Bulletin* viii/1 (March, 2002) at 12.

² The meaning of freedom is usually, even spontaneously, taken to be a "freedom from," following J. S. Mill's famous essay *On Liberty*. This is identically the despair of the human condition that forces the pagan flight from history to a nihilistic salvation, whose absolute negations are explored in the Hindu and Buddhist monastic traditions. C. S. Lewis saw it to require the abolition of man: no one acquainted with the twentieth century is in a position to disagree. However, the freedom with which this article is concerned is that freedom for which Christ has made us free: it is the freedom of covenantal fidelity, of that nuptially-ordered love for which we were made, our imaging of the free unity of the Triune God. It is the freedom of salvation history, appropriated only in worship, for it is purely gift, *gratia Christi*, mediated by the Church to the world.

The only Catholic historical consciousness is that which is appropriated in and formed by the Eucharistic liturgy. The theology of the Eucharist is the theology of history.

Augustine is of course the father of the theology of salvation history. In the *City of God* he provided the normative Western understanding of history for twelve centuries, down to the Enlightenment atheism which, following Voltaire, decided to understand history in terms of reason alone, as dependent for its significance upon man rather than upon God.³

This negation, encouraged by the speculation of Locke and Spinoza, was exploited by the Deist movement in England (John Toland, Matthew Tyndal, Thomas Woolston, Thomas Chubb, Conyers Middleton) and in America (Thomas Paine) in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Imported from England by Reimarus and Voltaire, Deism inspired the Enlightenment's skeptic rationalism and led to the formal apotheosis of "Reason" by the French Revolution. The Deist dehistoricization project was taken up by the new Prussian state, particularly in the University of Berlin, whence its devotion to the programmatic banishing of God from history, dubbed the "higher criticism" by contrast with the textual criticism of German scholars such as Bengel and Tischendorf, spread to all the Protestant theology faculties in Germany and, from Germany, throughout Europe and thence into the United States. The contemporary academy's categorical secularization of history has its inception in this secular confirmation of Luther's discovery of the total opacity of history to the divine, to the risen Christ.

An immediate corollary of the now normative "postulatory atheism" of the modern academy is the dehistoricization of the sacrifice of the Mass, and the rejection of the Catholic Church's sacramental realism across the board, its reduction to subjectivity.⁴ When history is so

³ The tradition of the Augustinian theology of salvation history underlying Bossuet's *Discours sur l'histoire universelle* (1684) was summarily dismissed in favor of a secular positivism by Voltaire's *Essai sur les mœurs* (1756), and from that time theology ceased to play a significant role in Western historiography. For a brief account of Voltaire's polemic, see Oskar Köhler, "The Enlightenment," in *History of the Church*, edited by Hubert Jedin and John Dolan; VI: *The Church in the Age of Absolutism and Enlightenment*, trans. Gunther J. Holst (New York: Crossroad, 1981) at 376. For a survey of the present academic climate see C. M. McIntire, Ed., *History and Historians: An Anthology of Modern Christian Views of History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); more recently, Charlotte Allen, *The Human Christ: The Search for the Historical Jesus* (New York: Simon, Schuster: the Free Press, 1998), ch. 3. Perhaps the best evidence of the current state of the historical art, *qua* theological, is provided by John O'Malley's articles, "Reform, Historical Consciousness, and Vatican II's *Aggiornamento*," *Theological Studies* 32 (1971) 573-601, "Developments, Reforms and Two Great Reformations: Towards a Historical Assessment of Vatican II," *ibid.*, 44 (1983) 373-406, and "Priesthood, Ministry and Religious Life: Some Historical and Historiographical Considerations," *ibid.*, 49 (June, 1988) 223-257, together with his recent book, *Tradition and Transition: Historical Perspectives on Vatican II* (Wilmington, DE: Glazier, 1989). For O'Malley, as for the editor of THEOLOGICAL STUDIES who characterized the 1971 article as a "break-through," a truly historical consciousness demands doctrinal reversibility as the index of human freedom in history. Thus also Bernard Lonergan: see my "Methodological Critique of Lonergan's Theological Method," *The Thomist* 50 (1986) 28-65. The ascendancy of this historicism, this rationalistic reduction of the concrete freedom of history to supposedly immanent necessities, is complete in the contemporary Catholic theological academy; its further documentation would be tedious.

⁴ An early sample of this mindset is provided by The Catholic Theological Society of America's *Proceedings*, Vol. 24 (1969) in which articles by Peter Chirico, Carl Armbruster, and Richard Dillon presented the basic lineaments of the new academic program for the Catholic dehistoricization of the Eucharist and the priesthood. Within five years Tad Guzie's *Jesus and the Eucharist* (New York: Paulist Press, 1974) took up the theme, echoed a year later by Edward

regarded, it is reduced to the level of the flesh which “profits nothing” simply because it signifies nothing: it is the realm of necessity and fragmentation whose finality is death. “Flesh,” in the Augustinian theology, following the Pauline tradition, is that human situation of absolute helplessness which is the consequence of the fall: in brief, history as “sarkic” has lost its free unity, to fall into a dynamic of fragmentation which knows no remedy and no surcease except death.⁵

The Enlightenment interpretation of history as a secular category, in the sense of devoid of intrinsic unity and significance, is at bottom an ideological normalization or underwriting of the fatally fragmented condition of fallen man as good and reasonable. Thereby, the empirical discovery of the fragmentation of whatever is historical sets the task of autonomous rationality: that is, of the mind governed by the immanently necessary laws of logic that the mind, insofar as autonomous, cannot and does not transcend. This normalization of fallen historicity requires and always involves a rationalist salvation schema by which the dilemma or surd inherent in fallenness, that dynamic of fragmentation whose academic expression is the problem of the one and the many, is suppressed, ordinarily by the imposition of categorical unity upon the fragments. This device, routine since the reception of Aristotelianism in the thirteenth century, is simply a variant of the Platonic flight from history to the ideal world, the pseudo- or self-salvation which the dialectical theology of a generation past condemned, but variants of which are always with us. These always amount to a denial of the significance of freedom, its reduction to randomness and irrationality. The semi-annual announcements of yet more radically dehistoricizing discoveries by the “Jesus Seminar” offer striking illustration of this a priori normalization of the fallenness of the good creation, as the “higher criticism” has done from its inception. The historically credible is that which does not affront the common sense of the man in the street who, it is taken for granted, hasn’t a thought in his head: i.e., whatever he can’t trip over is assumed not to be there. This avowedly popular agnosticism was reinvented sixty years ago by Bultmann, whose venture into the early Heidegger’s existentialism ascribed it to modernity as such. If the Bultmannian analysis of modernity is no longer followed in detail, his basic dehistoricizing project still dominates the academic exegesis of Scripture: no free institution can claim historical standing insofar as free and, a fortiori, no historicity may be assigned the sacramental mediation of the Kingdom of God as preached by Jesus, and opened up to the mind and vision of all men through his One Sacrifice.

None of that Revelation can be verified “historically;” as free, it is irreducible to a necessity of thought, which irreducibility is identified, a priori, with irrationality. The notion of a historical

Kilmartin’s “Apostolic Office: Sacrament of Christ,” *Theological Studies* 36 (1975) 243-264, followed by Bernard Cooke’s *Ministry to Word and Sacraments* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), Edward Schillebeeckx’s *MINISTRY: Leadership in the Community of Jesus Christ* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), Kilmartin’s *Church, Eucharist and Priesthood: A Theological Commentary on “The Mystery & Worship of the Most Holy Eucharist”* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), John Coleman’s “The Future of Ministry,” *America* 144 (March 28, 1981) 243-49 and “Ministry in the 80’s,” *Call to Growth/ Ministry* 9/2 (Winter, 1982) 24-31, and Thomas F. O’Meara’s *Theology of Ministry* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983). The sub-theological deprecation of Catholic sacramentalism became a growth industry. Meanwhile, nothing defending the ancient tradition survived the editorial scrutiny of the journals until Sr. Sara Butler reversed her field in “Forum: Second Thoughts on Ordaining Women,” *Worship* 63/2 (March, 1989) 157-165. Since then, a couple of editors have permitted her to publish her dissent from academic orthodoxy, but only with an accompanying article *sed contra*, otherwise found unnecessary.

⁵ Its remedy is of course the death of Jesus the Christ; there is no other name by whom we may be saved.

faith in a free truth is incomprehensible to the sarkic mind, to the mind content with, insistent upon, its fallenness, its fragmentation and its determinism, to the secular consciousness that contemporary exegesis requires of its adepts and which it absurdly designates as uniquely “historical.”

When one so views history—despairingly, as Plato did, within the quasi-Orphic religious tradition out of which he thought and wrote—one is reduced either to seeking salvation from that despair by a flight from history to an ideal immaterial world, or on the other hand, to seeking a comparably nonhistorical salvation by “immanentizing the eschaton” as the specific project of autonomous man, i.e., of man without God: man, whose infidelity is his usurpation of the divine Lordship of history and who presumes to transcend and so to redeem the fragmentation and determinism of history by imposing man’s autonomous meaning upon the otherwise meaningless time and space of his intrinsically absurd world, the world whose fragmentation is its only absolute. The latter alternative is the project of Enlightened modernity, viz., the programmatic foundation of utopia upon the rational necessity of progress. The history of the twentieth century is the history of the fraudulence of that humanistic project: it concludes always to what C. S. Lewis sixty years ago famously named the abolition of man.

Within the world celebrated by the Catholic liturgical tradition, the fleshly, or sarkic, enslaved condition of fallen man is redeemed—reconstituted, liberated, “for freedom made free”—not by man, but by the recapitulation of all things in Christ, in such wise that the free unity of history, lost by original sin, is restored, and history receives again, on the level of sacramental signing, the significance whose sole source is the Eucharistic immanence of the One Sacrifice of the risen Christ, who is present to and immanent in history as at once the High Priest offering the Sacrifice, and as the Victim offered, “the medicine of immortality, the remedy that we should not die.”

This is a hard saying. It is not much understood even within the purlieus of Catholic theology that, apart from the Eucharistic anamnesis of his One Sacrifice, Jesus is not the Lord of history, is not transcendent to history; for, apart from his Eucharistic transcendence of the fragmentation of the fallen world, the Sacrifice of the Cross would not be an exercise of his Lordship; the event of the crucifixion could only recede into an ever more inaccessible past, a past that it could neither transcend nor redeem.

It is only thus, by the transcendent immanence in history achieved in the Eucharistic representation of the constituting Event of this One Sacrifice, that history is “recapitulated,” that it has redemptive and salvific significance. This must be a free significance, freely and thus personally received: the free significance of salvation freely to be appropriated in faith. On that basis alone personal participation in history signs and effects participation in its freely appropriated finality, the Kingdom of God. This personal participation is simply covenantal fidelity, liturgically normed and liturgically expressed in the only objective praxis of historical freedom, dignity, authority and responsibility our fallen history knows: the Eucharistically and nuptially-ordered covenantal fidelity that is our imaging of God.

Obviously the salvific effect of this signing of the Kingdom of God cannot be reduced to the monadic, abstract, ideological unity, the utopia, the nonhistorical *telos*, that the Enlightened historian would impose *ab extra* upon the otherwise fragmented temporality that is history when viewed from an a priori refusal of faith in the Lord of history. Thus, the quest for the Kingdom of God is not and cannot become a political project, a function of some ideological fixation.

The Modernist Secularization of History and the Historical Church

With the Enlightenment's rejection of the Augustinian analysis of history as salvific, the Western world began to blind itself to the only free coherence, the only intrinsic significance that history has, the free intelligibility of its mediation of salvation by the Eucharistic immanence within it of the nuptial union of Christ and his Church. That blindness is now far advanced in Western culture.⁶

⁶ The decline of Catholic historical optimism in the West is evident in, e.g., Stephen Hawking's preferred notion of the goal of physics, an all-embracing "Grand Unification Theory" that, once in possession, would leave nothing really interesting for physicists to discover: see *Newsweek*, June 13, 1988, at 56. The conviction that an ultimately necessary reason underlies all reality and that its formulation is the *raison d'être* of physics is simply taken for granted by most contemporary physicists. Sheldon Lee Glashow, in "Toward a Unified Theory of Physics," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 23 (Spring, 1984) at 220, states it clearly: "Beyond the grand unified theory lies 'the Theory,' which unifies all the forces of nature. This is the greatest challenge of physics." Both the Einstein-Planck and the Copenhagen School interpretations of quantum mechanics would accept this statement, the former because it can be referred to the necessary causal sequences supposedly intrinsic to material reality, and the latter because it can be read as referring to the supposedly determining structures of mathematical reasoning by which our random experience of a universe devoid of causality is rationalized. In the latter case, physical intelligibility is intrinsic to the mind, and is thus ideal, while the physical world, being intrinsically unintelligible, is relegated to the chaotic; in the former, truth is intrinsic to a physical world independent of the human mind, but has a structure isomorphic with that of the logical necessities of human thought. Einstein considered it miraculous that this hypothesis should continually be verified. Reductively, Einstein's view is pantheist, looking to an impersonal Mind as the unitary intelligence to whose necessary and monist rationality both the world and human minds conform. David N. Schramm and Gary Steigman, "Particle Accelerators Test Cosmological Theory," *Scientific American* 258/6 (June, 1988) 66-72, also anticipate a penultimate Grand Unification Theory (G.U.T.) to be succeeded to by a T.O.E. (Theory of Everything). It is instructive that these theories are to be verified by experimental means which drive ever closer to a nonhistorical *terminus a quo*, the absolutely primordial moment in which all reality is supposedly locked by absolute rational necessity into a homogenous singularity. Only the stubborn specificity of concrete historical reality defeats the quest, but the cosmological hunger now becoming explicit in physics is devoted to the asymptotic transcendence of history—and finally, therefore, of experiment as well. See Heinz R. Pagels, *Perfect Symmetry*, at 167: "Only a few physicists have any confidence that such ideas (viz., G.U.T.s) are completely right; they are certainly untested. Yet if the rational picture of the cosmos comes out of these ideas, it could conceivably bring the science of physics to an end." Physicists sharing the current interest in "fractals" (a term evidently coined by Benoit Mandelbrot: see James Gleick, *Chaos: Making a New Science*, [New York: Penguin Books, 1987] at 98) understand the obsolescence of the deterministic paradigm of scientific rationality, although its vocabulary remains: i.e., the patterns of intelligible novelty which fractals exhibit is still attributed to "chaos." The religious and theological notion of a free intelligibility intrinsic to material reality does not yet much interest the scientific community. Pope John Paul II, in a recent letter, challenges that indifference. See his letter of 1 June, 1988, to Father George Coyne, S.J., Director of the Vatican Observatory, of which the following passage stands out, even from the *embarras des richesses* provided there:

Understanding is achieved when many data are unified in a common structure. The one illuminates the many; it makes sense of the whole. Simple multiplicity is chaos; an insight, a single model, can give that chaos structure and draw it into intelligibility. We move toward unity as we move toward

On the Enlightened ground of the autonomy of intellectual inquiry, particularly of inquiry into the realm of history, the culture of “modernity” has been erected. It rejects as irrational the Augustinian-patristic development of the historical optimism integral to Roman Catholicism. Nonetheless, the influence of the Catholic tradition, particularly in its moral demands, has remained effective in Protestant circles over the centuries, despite the Reform’s conclusion to the total “corruption” of history and the consequent absence of moral freedom and responsibility within it.

However, to the extent of their preservation of Christian optimism, Protestants, like Catholics, found their faith in Christ controverted by the dehistoricizing project which Enlightened modernity identified with intellectual freedom and personal responsibility. Thus enfranchised, freed of moral responsibility by its infidelity, its rejection of the dogmatic and moral authority of the Church, autonomous reason became indistinguishable from the quest of the ancient pagan rationale for necessary causes, and could no longer accept the rationality of the free historical existence upon which morality depends any more than it could accept the rationality of the free sacramental signing of salvation within history. For Modernity as for paganism, the personal exercise of moral responsibility for the future is at best an idiosyncrasy, finally an irrationality. Morality, dehistoricized, had become politics. As with Plotinus, freedom once again was seen to coincide with necessity. The coincidence is of course ideal, not encountered in history.

Modernity, forced to construct the world anew on principles of abstract rationality, could only condemn out of hand as fundamentalist, as obscurantist, whatever and whomever would oppose the utopian project. Indeed, within that deterministic world-view there could be no freedom to oppose it, hence the opposition could only be irrational, the act of an enemy of humanity, an obstacle to progress.

Recently, however, the prophets of post-modernity have been assailing (belatedly) the legitimacy of the project of modernity, for its presuming to construct a universe intelligible on modernity’s own premises—premises which are held invariably to betray an agenda, and so a covert hunger, not for truth, but for power. It may be that such criticism is self-condemned, that it merits no answer beyond a *tu quoque*; however, that can hardly serve to rehabilitate the project of

meaning in our lives. *Unity is also the consequence of love. If love is genuine, it moves not toward the assimilation of the other, but toward union with the other.* Human community begins in desire when that union has not been achieved, and it is completed in joy when those who have been apart are now united.

John Paul II, “A Dynamic Relationship of Theology and Science,” *Origins* 18 (1988) 375-378, 377 (emphasis added.)

This passage proposes a return to the covenantal unity of all created being: its historicity, its freedom in unity. No other notion of intelligible unity can serve an experimental science, for all others are ideal, unconcerned for our concrete historical experience in and of the world. It alone can provide a reason for the astonishing beauty the “fractals” suggest to be at the heart of all concrete things, and cannot but recall the multitudinous “inscape” of all creatures which the English Jesuit poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins, influenced perhaps by Duns Scotus, celebrated in an unconventional imagery and metre itself invoking the fresh loveliness he found pervading the physical world.

Enlightenment rationality, i.e., the programmed construction of a rationally coherent universe of man in which all evil is rationally overcome. In 1931 Kurt Gödel published the incompleteness theorems that have shattered irreparably the vaunted autonomy of reason. Gödel's unanswerable critique of the Enlightenment project did not wait upon the methodological suspicion of the post-modern deconstructionists.⁷

In the intervening seventy years, however, and with no effective dissent, the Catholic academy has become so accustomed to modernity, so comfortable with it, so dependent upon it, that the Catholic scholar who now refuses to share in that complaisance is judged to lack the only credentials his colleagues now find themselves able to respect. This consequence is now so well known, so sedulously enforced, as to make citation otiose.

The result has been that the Catholic historical optimism inseparable from the sacramental realism of Catholic worship has been eclipsed over the course of a few decades by reason of the wholly uncritical immersion of the Catholic academy in the supposedly historical "consciousness" of the Enlightenment, whose acceptance is today so conventional, so nearly universal, as to be incapable of serene academic discussion in most university and college purlieus. Only those academic excommunicates who have been condemned a priori as "fundamentalists" and "Vatican theologians" find in the interpretation of history a valid theological interest; however, it is one to be pursued *sub rosa*, rather like smoking cigarettes, lest the sensibilities of the warrantable scholars be offended.

The task before us is the rediscovery of the inherently liturgical significance of history, in contrast with that alternative view which finds history entirely devoid of intrinsic significance. This requires a statement of the basic elements of the Eucharistically-normed historical consciousness inseparable from and in fact identical to personal participation in the Church's Eucharistic worship of the Lord of history, which is personal appropriation of the salvation efficaciously signed by the Church's historical worship of her Lord. This is a worship in truth, in the free truth of history. To participate in that worship is to participate in its truth and, specifically, in the truth of the historical documents, the Scriptures, whose reading is integral to that free worship. The problems which this analysis of history poses have a single solution, the Eucharistic immanence of the Lord of History, whose Lordship is Eucharistic, and causes the Church to be and to be historical.

The Recovery of the Theological Category of History through its Eucharistic Ordering

Catholic historical optimism, in the sense of a consciousness that one's actions in history are significant for eternity, rests upon the truth of the Eucharistic words of institution, "This is my Body, This is my Blood," which truth is understood in the Church to effect the objective, historical

⁷ Kurt Gödel's incompleteness theorems established, in 1931, the incapacity of the mind to frame such clear and coherent comprehensions on any serious level; see Ernest Nagel and James R. Newman, *Gödel's Proof* (New York: New York University Press, 1958).

offering, in the Person of Christ, of his One Sacrifice, which is identically the Event of the Cross.⁸ Thus, the literal sense of the words of institution affirms the historically objective presence, under the signs of bread and wine, of the offering in his Person of the One Sacrifice of Jesus the Christ, at once the High Priest and the Victim of that Sacrifice: the Lamb that was slain, the King of Kings. The Eucharistic liturgy affirms Jesus to be the unity of the past, the present, and the future; in him is fulfilled the Messianic hope; he is the Priest and Victim who fulfills Malachi's prophecy of the offering of a clean sacrifice, whose sacrificial institution of the One Flesh of the New Covenant fulfills Jeremiah's prophecy. In brief, the Old Covenant finds in the One Sacrifice of Jesus the Christ its unlooked-for culmination, but as one who announces the fulfilled Kingdom of God, and presents himself as that King, and as the Son of Man, who will come again to judge the living and the dead. Thus, the words of institution proclaim, in the central act of the Church's worship, the free unity of the past, the present, and the future in the Event of the One Sacrifice of Christ.

The theological analysis of this free unity reached its final expression in the early twelfth century, at the monastery school of Laon where, under another Anselm, the Augustinian tradition of sacramental realism, established seven centuries earlier in Augustine's response to the Donatist heresy, was enshrined in a formula which sets out the double sacramental signing by which history is salvific.⁹

In order to explain this point, a certain amount of technical language is necessary. The Fathers and the monastic theologians required eight hundred years, from Tertullian to Anselm of Laon, to achieve clarity in the understanding of sacramental causality and historicity: its precision and subtlety do not leap to the eye. The Augustinian-patristic analysis of sacramental realism as finally established at Laon distinguishes three historical moments or stages of sacramental reality, which are sequential in time. In the Eucharist we deal with the before and after proper to a central or focal sign-Event, the One Flesh of Christ and his bridal Church, the New Covenant. This Event is the historically subsequent objective effect of a historically prior sacramental sign, the Eucharistic liturgy and, as an effect of that prior signing, is itself an effective sign, causally prior to the terminal final effect of that Event's signing, which final effect is personal union with the risen Christ in his Kingdom.

The latter effect of the Eucharistic signing is efficaciously signed in history by personal participation in the One Flesh of Christ and his bridal Church, the second Eve who is never apart from the second Adam, whether in the here of our fallen history, i.e., visibly and historically within

⁸ This is another hard saying. Nonetheless, the Council of Trent affirmed this identity: the Sacrifice of the Mass differs from the Sacrifice of the Cross only in the "mode of offering;" the modes are there distinguished as "*cruenta, incruente*:" i.e., bloody and bloodless. This is not a distinction between objectivity and subjectivity, as even sacramental theologians have supposed..

⁹ Pedro Lopez Gonzalez, "Origen de la expresión 'res et sacramentum'" *Scripta Theologia* 17 (1985), 73-119, traces the formula to a theological development that found its final expression in the school of Anselm of Laon in the early twelfth century. See also F. Soria, "La teoría del signo en S. Augustin" *Ciencia Tomista* 92 (1965) 357-396, and H. M. Féret, "Sacramentum-Res dans la langue théologique de saint Augustin," *Revue des Science Phil. et Théol.* 29 (1940) 223ff. This double sacramental signing (the conversion of the bread and wine, the conversion of the recipient) should not be thought original with Augustine: Tertullian recognized both effects, as did Origen.

the central sign-Event of her Eucharistic anamnesis, or invisibly in the hereafter of her eschatological fulfillment as the Kingdom of God. There is no salvation that is not thus Eucharistically and therefore ecclesially mediated: the Spirit is given on no other basis. This does not mean that one must be a Catholic in order to live and die in the grace of Christ; it means only that Christ's Spirit is given to the world only in consequence of the offering of his One Sacrifice, on the Cross and on the Altar, inseparably.

These three moments of the Eucharistic liturgy are distinguished as (1) the *sacramentum tantum* which is a sign only, pointing to and signing that which it is not, has no proper significance of its own but was instituted by Christ efficaciously to sign, and so infallibly to cause, a historical effect, the Event of the One Sacrifice instituting the New Covenant, which would itself be also an efficacious sign. This infallible effect, the One Sacrifice instituting the New Covenant, is (2) the *res et sacramentum*, the One Sacrifice instituting the One Flesh of Christ and his Church, which is the objectively given, concrete historical effect of the *sacramentum tantum*. Yet it is itself liturgically visible under the signs of bread and wine, and so is itself a further sacramental sign, with its own inherent causality: it signs and by its signing causes the fulfilled Kingdom of God. This effect, (3) the *res tantum*, personal union with the risen Christ in his fulfilled Kingdom, is effect only, the final effect of the Eucharistic signing. This final effect, the *res tantum*, is not visible, and therefore it is not a sign, but it is that final result of sacramental realism to which all sacramental signing points and, by which signing, history itself is freely significant of salvation, of the achieved Kingdom of God. This final effect, the effect which is only an effect, is the full gift of the *Spiritus Creator* which the Son was sent by the Father to give: it is the fullness of the Good Creation, the goal of all historical freedom.

The application of this analysis, which is proper to salvation history and to whatever is historical by reason of its free participation in salvation history, can here be given only a few of its many possible illustrations.

Applied to the Eucharist, the *sacramentum tantum* is the Eucharistic liturgy in its totality; the *res et sacramentum* is the *res gemina*, the twin effect that is the Real Presence of Christ, under the appearances of bread and wine, to his worshiping Church, the Bride that proceeds from him as from her Head, in their covenantal union of One Flesh instituted by the One Sacrifice. This, the historical immanence of the New Covenant, is the direct consequence of the priest's recitation, in the person of Christ, of the words of institution pronounced definitively at the Last Supper.¹⁰ The *res tantum* is the worshiper's personal Communion in the One Sacrifice, in the Body and Blood that is the medicine of immortality. This Communion brings the communicant, supposing a worthy reception, into personal union, *in sacramento*, with the Risen King in his Kingdom.

¹⁰ The recent approval by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments of the liturgical use in some eastern Churches of the liturgy of Addai and Marai, which has no words of institution, may be thought to have placed this statement of their centrality in doubt. However, there can be no doubt of the normative value, for the Eucharistic liturgy, of the words of institution recited by our Lord in the Synoptic accounts, and in I Corinthians. This has not been put in issue by the Congregation's decision. The Church worships in truth, and the basic truth of that worship is uttered in the Eucharistic words of institution.

Applied to the free unity of salvation history, the analysis sees the *sacramentum tantum* of salvation history to be the Old Covenant, (understood, as by von Balthasar, as the salvific path from paganism to Christianity), while the *res et sacramentum* is the One Flesh, the New Covenant, and the *res tantum* is personal union with the risen Christ in the Kingdom of God. These form a free and inseparable unity, the free and efficacious sign of the full gift of the Spirit by the Son in obedience to his mission from the Father, a mission that terminates in his sacrificial institution of the New Covenant, the Good Creation, the Kingdom of God.

Applied to the free unity of our personal participation in the history of salvation, i.e., our passage from alienation from God to conversion, and from conversion to salvation: the *sacramentum tantum* is the condition of alienated flesh, the existence to death which is helpless of itself; the *res et sacramentum* is one's conversion by the grace of Christ to membership in his bridal Body, One Flesh with him; the *res tantum* is our final or eschatological union with him in heaven: the Pauline vocabulary would state personal participation in salvation history more concisely as the free unity of *sarx, mia sarx, pneuma*: here it must be remembered that for Paul, *pneuma* does not signify the immaterial, but the victory of the Resurrection over death, the eternal life that is life because in the Kingdom of God..

It must be remembered that the objective historical unity of these three moments is always free: the *res et sacramentum* is not deducible from the *sacramentum tantum*, nor is the *res tantum* deducible from the *res et sacramentum*. Both effects are works of the Spirit given by the risen Christ. As Augustine insists, and the entire Church with him, without grace we can do nothing: *sarx* or "flesh" is the condition of helpless alienation from God and from personal participation in the free nuptial unity, the One Flesh, *mia sarx*, of his Good Creation.

Similarly, as *sacramentum tantum*, the Old Covenant has no inherent significance of its own; the bread and the wine and the words of institution have no intrinsic capacity to effect the Real Presence and the One Sacrifice except as instituted by Christ. But, in fact, the sacraments are instituted by Christ, the grace of Christ is mediated sacramentally, and that mediation is ecclesial, achieved within the worship of the Church. Further, it must be remembered that the grace poured out by Christ on his bridal Church reaches all men of all time simply because it is sacramental, because by being sacramental, the free integration of the past, the present, and the future in one salvific history, it pervades all time sacramentally, as has been seen, either as *sacramentum tantum*, or as *res et sacramentum*, but in either modality as pointing to its eschatological fulfillment in the Kingdom, apart from which history has no meaning, no significance, for it mediates no salvation.

The application of the Augustinian-Patristic Paradigm to Exegesis

However, it is the application of the patristic paradigm to Scriptural exegesis that is here of primary interest. What has already been said, it may be hoped, will now make that application reasonably easy to understand.

The sacramental unity of salvation history is the unity of the Church's worship, which includes the reading of Scripture in the Church, by which reading its truth is mediated, liturgically and therefore historically. Within that liturgical reading it was early realized that Scripture has a plurality of senses, and that this plurality is nonetheless a unity, the unity of the Church's worship in truth. The several senses are liturgically unified and therefore are not divergent, as is so often and even routinely supposed, but within that free unity they reinforce each other and are indissociable from each other. Once again, their free unity in plurality is that of the sacramental worship itself. It has prompted commentary from the end of the first century: the positive interrelation of faith and reason is no novelty in the Church.

This liturgical insight governs the patristic and early medieval reading of the Scripture, whose discovery of distinct senses, as the patristic and medieval meditation had distinguished them, is summed up in a famous couplet:

Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria
*Moralis quid agas, quo tendas (quid speres) anagogia.*¹¹

De Lubac's translator has rendered this as:

The letter teaches events, allegory what you should believe;
 Morality teaches what you should do, anagogy what mark you should be aiming for.

The subtlety of the parenthetical "(quid speres)" is little remarked: it is a recognition that the literal sense, as mediated by the allegorical sense, has hope as its anagogical component while, as mediated by the moral sense, its anagogy, "quo tendas," is aspiration.¹² Thus it is evident that the literal sense, from this ancient viewpoint, is never merely literal: it is always a historical sense, sacramentally integrated. The allegorical and the moral senses both relate to the literal sense as the *res et sacramentum* relates to the *sacramentum tantum*, i.e., as their indispensable free and concrete ground.

¹¹ The couplet has been traced to Alexander of Dacia, a contemporary of St. Thomas. See Robert Mc-Nally's review article, "Medieval Exegesis," *Theological Studies* 22 (1961) at 447; see also the Introduction of Henri de Lubac's *Medieval Exegesis I: The Four Senses of Scripture*; ser. Ressourcement: Retrieval and Renewal in Catholic Theology, trans. Mark Sebanc, foreword by Robert Luis Wilken (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998).

¹² In his *Theology in History* (with a foreword by Michel Sales; translated by Anne Englund Nash [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996]), de Lubac has explored the tripartite anthropology corresponding to the Eucharistic *ordo* of creation, from its scriptural foundation in Paul's distinction between flesh, soul, and spirit, through its exploitation by Augustine down to the modern period. See Part I, Sec. II, at 157, and again in 187-193 at 190 where, twice citing his *Exégèse médiévale* II, 632, de Lubac notes that also within this tripartite anthropology, anagogy fulfills tropology and allegory. See also *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, vol. 2, trans. E. M. Macierowski, ser. Ressourcement: Retrieval and Renewal in Catholic Thought (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), at 127ff, for a statement of this same relation, with a stress upon the priority of the allegorical over the tropological, or moral, sense, within their free liturgical unity.

Given the Eucharistically-normed history of salvation, it could not be otherwise: it is only in entering upon and persevering in the covenantal fidelity that is our imaging of God that we appropriate *in ecclesia* our free, nuptially-ordered substantial unity, *in sacramento*.

It continues to be necessary to speak of and therefore to distinguish the literal, the allegorical, the moral, and the anagogical or eschatological senses of scripture. However, their radical historical unity has lately been little appreciated. Exegetes are perennially tempted by the rationalist reservation of concrete historicity to the literal sense, with the consequent relegation of the other, “spiritual” senses (allegorical and moral) to mere nonhistorical subjectivity. The conflict in the fourth and fifth centuries between the Antiochene and the Alexandrine theologians over the legitimacy of the use of allegory presents an instance of this temptation among the Antiochenes, in some of whom Newman saw an anticipation of the rationalist resistance which his own recognition of the historicity of the allegorical sense of scripture had received from the liberal theologians of his day.

When historicity is thus reserved to the literal sense, two disastrous effects ensue: the literal sense is understood, at least ideally, to be without allegorical, moral, or anagogical content or application. Thus understood, the literal sense then becomes irrelevant to the religious reading of the Scriptures, as is witnessed by most of the articles in, e.g., the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* over the past thirty years. Further, history itself is reduced to the secular and deterministic intrinsic insignificance, the inherent fragmentation, that was presupposed and exploited by the Deists and the Enlightenment *philosophes* to justify their dehistoricization of the faith of the Church. Thus today, the literal sense is generally understood by contemporary exegetes to be ideally value-free, “presumptionless,” uncommitted, presuppositionless, alien to any religious interest. Thus understood, the exegete must reject a religious interest in scripture as contaminating the pure objectivity of the abstract, dehistoricized, “historical consciousness” required of his “scientific study of the Scriptures.”¹³

In our own time, meaning the six decades since the promulgation of the Encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu* in 1943, the debate between exegetes and confessionally-committed theologians has become if anything more acerbic. That Encyclical’s emphasis upon the priority of the literal sense over the other senses has generally been understood, within the Catholic exegetical academy,

¹³ Henri Cardinal de Lubac’s insights into patristic and early medieval exegesis, as developed particularly in *Corpus mysticum: L’Eucharistie et l’Église au moyen âge, Étude historique*, 2^e édition, revue et augmentée, ser. Théologie 3 (Paris: Aubier, Éditions Montaigne, 1949), *Histoire et esprit: L’intelligence de l’Écriture d’après Origène*, ser. Théologie 16 (Paris: Aubier, Éditions Montaigne, 1950), and *Exégèse médiévale, les quatre sens de l’Écriture* I-IV, ser. Théologie 41 (part 1 and part 2) 42, 59 (Paris: Aubier, Éditions Montaigne, 1959, 1961, 1964), are foundational for historical-liturgical exegesis. He has provided a highly compressed summary of *Exégèse médiévale* in *L’Écriture dans la tradition* (Paris: Aubier, 1967); the latter work, fortunately, exists in translation as *The Sources of Revelation*, trans. Luke O’Neill (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968). John L. McKenzie’s review article, “A Chapter in the History of Spiritual Exegesis: de Lubac’s *Histoire et esprit*,” *Theological Studies* 12 (1951) 365-381, is a typical early expression by a Catholic theologian of distaste for de Lubac’s exegetical interest in allegory, as opposed to the minimalist literalism then becoming fashionable. The book whose view of exegesis McKenzie criticized in this review is an appreciation of the historicity of Origen’s allegorical or typological exegesis, which McKenzie rejected as making “scientific” exegesis impossible. More recent illustrations of the same mentality are provided in Roger Balducelli’s review, in “*The Apostolic Origins of Clerical Continence: A Critical Appraisal of a New Book*,” *Theological Studies* 41 (1982) 693-705, of a major work by a French Jesuit historian, and in George T. Dennis’s comparably dismissive review of the English translation of the same book in *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* 52 (1991) 738-39.

to give an exclusive license to that “scientific” exegesis which depends entirely and exclusively upon the Enlightened notion of historical consciousness.¹⁴

Such an interpretation of the Encyclical is aberrant: it rests upon what has here been termed a sarkic, dehistoricized historical consciousness. As compared to the liturgically-informed historical consciousness patent in the Augustinian-patristic analysis of sacramental realism just examined, the historical consciousness of the Enlightenment amounts to the rationalistic, Eleatic disintegration of the free unity of the sacramental truth of the Church’s liturgical reading of Scripture, with the consequence that one must choose between the literal-historical and spiritual-supposedly-nonhistorical senses of scripture, rather than understand them as the liturgy understands them, in their free, multifaceted historical and liturgical unity which, as historical, are confessional, and can never be abstract or disinterested.

The historical unity proper to the Church’s sacramental worship interrelates the senses of scripture according to the sacramental analysis just described. Apart from this religious insight into the freedom and historicity of that interrelation, the interpretation of historical documents as such is inexorably submitted to the rationalist secular scrutiny which dismisses as nonhistorical all the historically significant questions. The question-begging is so simple, so obvious, that it could hardly deceive a child, yet its validity passes without challenge from any countervailing view of history and historicity in today’s climate of exegetical conformism.

However, the liturgically-informed historical consciousness is not defeated by such captious syllogizing. That consciousness is freed by the liturgy itself to worship the risen Christ as the Lord of history, by whose dominion history is freed of those necessities which the Enlightened exegesis would re-impose, to become the history of salvation. Within this religious consciousness, the medieval doublet just recited retains its significance, for thereby the primary sense or historical signification of Scripture, analogously that of the *sacramentum tantum*, is certainly the literal sense. The allegorical sense and the moral senses pertain to the *res et sacramentum*, while the anagogical or eschatological sense is of course that of the *res tantum*. Scripture thus has a sacramental unity, historicity, and truth whose foundation is the Eucharistic sacrifice, the final recapitulation of our broken sarkic history by the institution of the One Flesh, *mia sarx*, of the New Covenant.

These senses as sacramentally and liturgically integrated are historical in their unity, but are in no way in competition or tension: rather, they illumine each other and are mutually supportive, mutually indispensable.

The literal sense understands the physical events of history as effectively signing the allegorical sense: e.g., the literal meaning of the titles drawn from the Old Testament look to the

¹⁴ John Meier, in *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus, I: The Roots of the Problem and the Person* (New York: Doubleday, 1991) has been particularly insistent upon the Enlightenment view of history as normative for and essential to the exegetical project. Msgr. Meier is a former president of the Catholic Biblical Association.

Christ for their Christian meaning, a meaning that is fulfilled eschatologically, but which is concretely and objectively given in history.

The literal sense of Scripture signifies also the moral sense, as the Law of the Old Covenant finds its fulfillment in the Sermon on the Mount, and looks anagogically to the fullness of justice which the Sermon promises.

Thus the literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogic senses of Scripture are all historical, and in their historicity are dependent upon each other. Were the literal sense deprived of its allegorical and moral signing, it would revert to a sarkic incoherence, and no longer be a free and therefore historical sense. Were the allegorical and moral interpretations of Scripture dissociated from the concrete signing by the literal sense, they would have no concrete foundation independent of the subjectivity of the worshiper, and would then become mere vagaries of the mind, reducible to its supposed immanent necessities, its myth-making proclivity.

It is evident that the literal, allegorical, and moral senses depend for their free interrelation upon their further signing of the anagogical sense, that which is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God. This only confirms their sacramental integration, wherein the *res tantum*, the final effect of sacramental signing, vindicates the signing. The tropological or moral sense is equally integral to the full meaning of the Scripture; it would be absurd for the exegete to ignore or prescind from the moral import of, e.g., the Passion narrative; Christ preached the Kingdom as something more than mere information. To participate in the liturgy, to which the proclamation of the Scripture is integral, is to enter into the imaging of God, into covenantal fidelity. Failure to find moral exhortation in the Scripture is failure to read it historically, which is to say, liturgically.

It is also evident that the moral sense of Scripture, like the literal and the allegorical senses, is also anagogical: the “*quid agas*” of the couplet is at one with its “*quid speres*,” not as in the juridical reciprocity of a “*do ut des*,” but in the full freedom of a law, obedience to which is only the love whose expression in history is fidelity to the Covenant. But it is a love of him who loved us first, when there was nothing in us to love; the moral sense is firmly grounded in the event of the Cross, in which Jesus the Christ fulfilled and transcended the Law.

As Jesus’s obedience to the Father and his fidelity to the bridal Church are the measure of morality, so the moral sense of Scripture is historical, grounded in the literal sense, understood in the allegorical, fulfilled in the anagogical freedom of the children of the one Father in their Father’s house. *It must be emphasized that this is a nuptially-ordered moral freedom*, for it is fidelity to the nuptially-ordered Covenant, the One Flesh of Christ and his bridal Church, instituted on the Cross: here alone is the ancient dilemma of ‘the one and the many’ resolved.

Clearly, the anagogical sense of Scripture is indispensable; however, because its content—that goal to which we tend, that inheritance for which we hope, “which the eye has not seen, nor the ear heard, nor has entered into the mind of man to conceive”—is thus beyond all imagination and utterance, it might easily be thought nonhistorical had not the King of this Kingdom revealed

his royalty and exercised his authority on the Cross in the Event of the One Sacrifice by which we are made, in him, a kingly people, and given the eternal life which only he has. It is this historical Event of which the Scripture speaks, and speaks literally, allegorically, morally, and anagogically, in the single utterance which is the Old Testament and the New, read daily in the Church.

When exegetes refuse or ignore the free, liturgically grounded unity and truth of history—grounded, that is, in the Sacrifice of the Mass and the consequent free historical order of salvation history, summed up as the free unity of the *sacramentum tantum*, the *res et sacramentum* and the *res tantum* freely ordered to each other in such wise as to link the salvific significance of past to the Event which orders that past to itself and, through the Event itself, to its anagogic fulfillment in the Kingdom of God—history cannot but be seen to be corrupt, because neither its past nor its present retains an intrinsic unity of meaning that might point to any salvific fulfillment, to any free future whatever. All that is left is the living out of a blind determinism or an equally blind chaos.

Once the nihilistic impact of viewing history thus pessimistically, with a sarkic secularity, is grasped, any ignoramus can deride the Christian confidence in salvific history with impunity. No specialized learning, no particular acumen, is required, for all the questions worthy of attention have already been begged in the original rejection of the historical immanence of the risen Christ, the Lord of history by whose unconditioned immanence all history is freed from its necessities to become the medium of our salvation. Once this denial of his historical Lordship is explicit, there remains nothing of significance to discuss, much less to do, and those who are seen to continue to act as though history were significant of salvation can only appear ridiculous. The Jesus Seminar, as Charlotte Allen has indicated in her recent fine study, *THE HUMAN CHRIST*, betrays the embittered animus of such 17th and 18th century polemicists as Reimarus.¹⁵ Two and a half centuries of uncritical levies upon that “historical consciousness” have proven it barren of hermeneutical resource.

¹⁵ Charlotte Allen, *The Human Christ*, at 73ff. *et passim*, s.v.