

## I

## The Call of Unity

So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

John 10:16

There are three essential problems in contemporary Catholic eucharistic theology, and each concerns the separation of two concepts that ought to be inseparable: eucharistic conversion and conversion of life; real presence and sacrifice; and the sacrifice of the cross and the sacrifice of the Eucharist. It is not accidental that these problems coincide with the most vexing theological differences between Catholics and mainline Protestants on the Eucharist; the post-Reformation Catholic theological conversation has been defined by the need to evaluate the problems that sparked the Western schisms.<sup>1</sup> Until the early twentieth century, of course, this internal conversation was primarily defensive, fortifying established confessional positions.<sup>2</sup> Since the Catholic Church's institutional validation and centralization of the ecumenical movement at the Second Vatican Council, theologians have sought instead to adopt a broadly acceptable consensus position on these issues, assisted by critical reformulations of traditional positions in new philosophical language.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This book draws freely on conversations with the East, but focuses on those within the West, because it is in the West, not the East, where the Eucharist plays a primary role in ecclesial disunity.

<sup>2</sup> Although some of these defensive postures are polemical, not all are: see, for example, Michon M. Matthiesen's treatment of Maurice de La Taille in *Sacrifice As Gift: Eucharist, Grace, and Contemplative Prayer in Maurice de La Taille* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Perhaps the most eminent example of this approach is Edward Schillebeeckx, "Transubstantiation, Transfinalization, Transignification," in *Living Bread, Saving Cup*:

At the same time, there seems to be a new kind of ecumenism afoot. In the academic world, it has given rise to “receptive ecumenism,” that is, a dialogue that prioritizes an ecumenical exchange of gifts over the weighing of different doctrinal positions.<sup>4</sup> This approach requires explicit reflection on ecclesial locations and commitments, the valuing of the distinct goodness and Christian witness of the dialogue partner, and a willingness to change one’s mind.<sup>5</sup>

Liturgical action to heal the memory of history has an irreplaceable role to play in this new kind of ecumenism. The 2016 “Common Prayer” of the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church in Lund, Sweden, was a nonacademic exemplary performance of this approach to ecumenism. It was marked by the construction of a shared narrative which began to overwrite the discordant narratives about Christian history that each church has inherited from its forebears. This reconstructed collective memory is not objective or colorless. Rather, it is suffused with emotional energy:

We come with different thoughts and feelings of thanksgiving and lament, joy and repentance, joy in the Gospel and sorrow for division . . . Jesus Christ, Lord of the church, send your Holy Spirit! Illumine our hearts and heal our memories. O Holy Spirit: help us to rejoice in the gifts that have come to the Church through the Reformation, prepare us to repent for the dividing walls that we, and our forebears, have built, and equip us for common witness and service in the world.<sup>6</sup>

*Readings on the Eucharist*, ed. R. Kevin Seasoltz (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1982), 175–89.

<sup>4</sup> P. D. Murray and Luca Badini Confalonieri, eds., *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> In addition to the Durham conference publications, see such works as John H. Armstrong, *Your Church Is Too Small: Why Unity in Christ’s Mission Is Vital to the Future of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014); John H. Armstrong, *Costly Love: The Way to True Unity for All the Followers of Jesus* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press of the Focolare, 2017); David Nugent Field, *Bid Our Jarring Conflicts Cease: A Wesleyan Theology and Praxis of Church Unity* (Nashville, TN: General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, 2017); P. J. FitzPatrick, *In Breaking of Bread: The Eucharist and Ritual* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1993); Frank C. Senn, *Eucharistic Body* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> Liturgical Task Force of the Lutheran–Roman Catholic Commission on Unity, “Common Prayer, From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017” (Lutheran World Federation/Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, 2016), 11–12. This liturgy was celebrated on October 31, 2016, to inaugurate the 500th anniversary and common commemoration of the beginning of the Reformation. Pope Francis led this particular prayer in Spanish.

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Liturgical action has likewise played an important role in the development and propagation of theological disputes, especially regarding the Eucharist. The proper context of the Reformation disputes about the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist and sacrifice is the complex history of eucharistic celebration and lay participation in the Latin West. In particular, the early medieval decline in lay participation, including lay communion, was the essential but forgotten history behind the sixteenth-century disputes. The first millennium of Christianity nurtured a Cambrian explosion of eucharistic images and models, each of which evoked the next in dizzy fecundity. The proper outcome of ecumenical dialogue is not to settle on the one right theological model for the Eucharist. Rather, to unbuild walls we need to reintegrate our existing models, which are the lonely, sometimes fossilized, debris of this once-flourishing ecosystem. By doing this, we can also prepare the ground for new spiritual and theological metaphors to develop from contemporary Christians' encounter with God in eucharistic worship. In order to do this, shared historical memory, philosophical tools, and scrutiny of liturgical practice are all needed.

The first and most important theological problem of ecumenical eucharistic theology concerns how the ontological change of the eucharistic elements (*conversio*) effects a spiritual change in the participants, which is the ultimate purpose of the Eucharist.<sup>7</sup> Scholastic treatments (transubstantiation being one important model) eagerly pursued the philosophical intelligibility of the change in the elements at the expense of the spiritual ramifications for the believer. But *conversio* and conversion must be linked, as the reformers saw; rather than choosing between one or the other, the contemporary ecumenical and philosophical climate allows them to be reintegrated.

The second problem is the connection of the idea of sacrifice with the real presence of Christ in the elements after consecration.<sup>8</sup> The historical context of this problem in the practice of worship includes the developing technologies of liturgical bookmaking, changing understandings of the

<sup>7</sup> In the scholastic period, the universally acknowledged "final end" of the Eucharist was called the *res tantum*, the thing itself to which all symbolic elements pointed. This end was the eschatological unity of the whole Body of Christ, the church, with Christ himself as head.

<sup>8</sup> Edward Kilmartin drew attention to this problem in eucharistic theology in "The Catholic Tradition of Eucharistic Theology: Towards the Third Millennium," *Theological Studies* 55 (1994): 405–57; see also *The Eucharist in the West: History and Theology*, ed. Robert Daly (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998).

role of priesthood, and the decline of lay communion and lay offering of the elements for consecration.<sup>9</sup> The philosophical and theological context includes developing concerns about how to express the church's belief in the somatic real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Together, these led to an increased emphasis on the words of Christ (the institution narrative or *verba Domini*), interpreted apart from the language of offering that suffuses the rest of the Roman Canon.<sup>10</sup> This in turn led to a variety of unsatisfactory philosophical explanations in which somatic real presence is undergirded, but the connection between the real presence and the sacrifice offered (from whom, to whom, when, how?) is unclear. Furthermore, the cooperative agency of Christ, the minister, and the church are also muddled, leading to overweening emphasis on one or another in various authors.<sup>11</sup> Repairing this problem requires ruling out conceptions of sacrifice that are at odds with the ecumenical understanding of God and of justification,<sup>12</sup> but also altering our understanding of presence to reflect the dynamic exchange of gifts suggested by the liturgical performance itself. Since, ecumenically, real presence is widely acceptable and sacrifice is still quite controversial, it is important to recover the first-millennium theological ligaments that once connected these concepts.

Intertwined with this second problem is the third: the relationship of the sacrifice of the cross to the sacrifice of the Eucharist. This was perhaps the most important theological problem of the Reformation: it sparked the debate on justification, for example. When compared to debate about somatic presence, the philosophically informed theological reflection on eucharistic sacrifice in the late medieval period was embryonic.<sup>13</sup> Martin Luther very reasonably objected to the model that the priest offers the body and blood of Christ as an atonement to the Father, calling it an unjustifiable human presumption and an impediment to the

<sup>9</sup> Paul F. Bradshaw and Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Eucharistic Liturgies: Their Evolution and Interpretation* (London: SPCK, 2012), 193–232. See discussion of these developments in Chapter 2.

<sup>10</sup> Kilmartin, *The Eucharist in the West*, 142.

<sup>11</sup> Kilmartin, *The Eucharist in the West*, especially 127–54.

<sup>12</sup> Lutheran World Federation and Roman Catholic Church, “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification” (October 31, 1999), [www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-joint-declaration-doctrine-justification](http://www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-joint-declaration-doctrine-justification).

<sup>13</sup> For example, Thomas' treatment of the conversion of the Eucharist and the presence of Christ in the elements in the *Summa Theologiae* takes about thirty articles (almost all of III.75–8 deals with this topic), but he answers the question of whether the Eucharist is a sacrifice in a single article (III.83.1).

acceptance of the event of the cross in faith.<sup>14</sup> Ecumenical theology must recover the ways that early Christians used sacrificial language for the eucharistic liturgy without holding to such a problematic and simplistic model. There is a deeper unity between the event of the cross and the liturgy of the mass than this paradigm recognizes, and this unity must be connected to the question of the *conversio* of the eucharistic elements and of the communion of Christians.

Ecumenical dialogue points in the direction of a possible solution to this concatenation of issues. The 1982 World Council of Churches consensus document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* comes closest to addressing the controversial question of sacrifice in its section on *anamnesis*,<sup>15</sup> treating the Eucharist as “the living and effective sign of [Christ’s] sacrifice.”<sup>16</sup> The eucharistic liturgy sacramentally signifies Christ’s sacrifice (as memorial); in addition, in the Eucharist “the Church offers its intercession” and a “sacrifice of praise.”<sup>17</sup> The commentary on the document further recommends reflection on intercession as a way of understanding the traditional Catholic theology of the Eucharist as propitiatory sacrifice.

To reintegrate these threads – change and conversion, presence and sacrifice, mass and cross – demands a new approach that is at once historical, philosophical, and liturgical. It demands epistemic humility and audacious retrieval. An ecumenical theology of the Eucharist demands a substantial change.

### I.1 ECUMENICAL AND CATHOLIC

The last 500 years of eucharistic theology can be considered as an intellectual war – which has sometimes escalated into a physical war.<sup>18</sup> For a long time, all parties were quick to eliminate any vocabulary that

<sup>14</sup> Martin Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, 1520, ed. Paul W. Robinson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016).

<sup>15</sup> “Memorial,” or more precisely, a liturgical commemoration that provides an ongoing and transformative link between the people assembled and the saving event remembered.

<sup>16</sup> *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. 111, the “Lima Text” (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), §5.

<sup>17</sup> *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, §8, §4.

<sup>18</sup> “Lutherans and Catholics often focused on what separated them from each other rather than looking for what united them. They accepted that the Gospel was mixed with the political and economic interests of those in power. *Their failures resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people.* Families were torn apart, people imprisoned and tortured, wars fought and religion and faith misused” (Liturgical Task Force of the Lutheran–Roman Catholic Commission on Unity, “Common Prayer,” 14, emphasis added).

might smack of their rivals' positions, retreating within the walls of terminology solidified in the mutual excommunications of the sixteenth century. Within my own Roman Catholic tradition, transubstantiation and sacrifice were fortified in theological discussion, in liturgical practice, in popular devotion, in catechesis, and in preaching; the eucharistic theology of other Christians was adjudicated largely with respect to these two touchstones, and any metaphor or image that seemed "too Protestant" was suspect. The result was an incremental but constant narrowing of acceptably Roman Catholic positions to be as near as possible to officially promulgated doctrinal language. It was least risky, especially in the context of pastoral or homiletic reflection, to simply repeat the words of Trent or the catechism. As in warfare, however, when one burns the farmlands outside, the fortresses grow weaker and weaker: there is little to no communication between them, and very little new life enters or leaves the gates. As a result, the Eucharist became not a fertile ground for the production of new interpretations, spiritualities, and ways of life but rather a minefield wherein one's orthodoxy, as judged by the fortress walls, is always being adjudicated.

The direct result of this defensive confessionism has divorced what it is right to say about the Eucharist from what is nourishing. Presence and sacrifice have been divided from the aspects of eucharistic imagery that connect them to ordinary life: feast, thanksgiving, harvest, breadmaking, death, daily meals, and community bonding, all of which appear frequently in first-millennium eucharistic reflection. These aspects have gone missing from discussions of real presence because of the way the metaphysical explanations of real presence were developed and protected in polemical, anti-Reformation contexts. In addition, theologies of the proclamation of the Word, of the communal meal, and of participation in the heavenly liturgy, rediscovered in conversation with the Reformation traditions and with the East, still sit uneasily in isolation from the Aristotelian language for transubstantiation.

Twentieth-century ecumenical dialogue took a huge step by placing the shared ground of real presence at the center of conversations about the Eucharist, but there is more to do. The abandoned lands in between the polemical confessional positions, and most especially the central identity of the Eucharist as *thanksgiving*, are the key to restored life. The right moment has come to listen to one another and step forward together, even if we do not know the way.

In the rest of this chapter I lay out the grounds for an ecumenical Catholic theology of the Eucharist. I provide three different answers to

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the question, “why an ecumenical Catholic theology?” Finally, I outline a path forward, grounded in listening again to the canons of Trent on the Eucharist and to the ecumenical dialogues culminating in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (1982) and ecclesial responses to that document.<sup>19</sup>

1.2 WHY AN ECUMENICAL CATHOLIC THEOLOGY  
 OF THE EUCHARIST?

By the early scholastic period, Christian reflection on the Eucharist took it as a priori that the sacrament’s ultimate reality,<sup>20</sup> both represented and made real by the eucharistic liturgy, was the unity or mutual charity of the universal Christian church in Christ. For Thomas Aquinas, the visible consecrated bread and wine of communion both signify and realize other layers of reality: the risen Christ’s body and blood, which is realized “substantially”; the passion of Christ, which is realized through memory; and the unity of the church, which is realized eschatologically. The ultimate purpose of every sacrament is human beatitude or salvation; the Eucharist is complete only if it contributes to salvation through the free cooperation of the person. For a soteriological reality to come to fruition, ultimately, the human person must be integrated into the saving history of God’s election of God’s own people. In short, proper celebration and proper theological reflection on the Eucharist must, of its very nature, build up the unity of the whole Christian church. To do eucharistic theology is to do ecumenical theology.

From a trinitarian point of view, the doctrine of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist articulates the Christological and incarnational principle of the eschatological unity of the universal church in Christ at the end of days. This principle must, however, be balanced by a pneumatological principle. It is the Holy Spirit that invisibly propels the church toward its *eschaton*, and it is likewise the Holy Spirit that engenders Christ’s presence in the Eucharist. The Western theological tradition, despite its

<sup>19</sup> *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*; on responses to this document, see A. Houtepen, C. van Ligtenberg, and B. Veldhorst, *Bibliography on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (Lima Text) 1982–1987* (Leiden-Utrecht: Interuniversitair Instituut voor Missiologie en Oecumenica, 1988); Max Thurian, ed., *Churches Respond to BEM: Official Responses to the “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry” Text*, 6 volumes (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986).

<sup>20</sup> In scholastic theology, *res tantum* (“reality alone,” meaning that it stands on its own and does not represent some deeper truth), to distinguish it from the sign of the sacrament. For a more complete treatment of this concept, see the excursus at the end of this chapter.

Christocentrism, never abandoned the notion that the consecration is done “by the power of the Holy Spirit,” a doctrine that receives more emphasis in the East and also in some Protestant traditions.<sup>21</sup> The Holy Spirit also empowers the assembly to receive that presence by enabling them to recognize it in faith and by preparing them for communion. A complete trinitarian picture of real presence already requires a fuller treatment of the indwelling of Christ in the church by the power of the Holy Spirit and the eschatological completion of the church’s unity in charity.

Eucharistic theology must move beyond real presence to the reconciliation of Christian disunion as a pointer to the deepest reality (*res*) of the sacrament: the *communio* of the church. This requires both personal and institutional transformation by the charity that partakes in the Holy Spirit, but this is itself the gift of the Eucharist. So in writing an ecumenical eucharistic theology as a Catholic, I am attempting to respond to and integrate the grace I have received in the Eucharist. The theology in this book is not meant to be a detached systematic truth, but an active attempt at conversion and transfiguration through reading in charity. It has been so for the writer, and it is meant to be so for you, my readers.

In a major 1994 article, Edward Kilmartin argued that the biggest challenge facing Catholic eucharistic theology in the third millennium was the disintegration of the patristic synthesis about the Eucharist into the two disconnected theological poles of real presence and sacramental sacrifice.<sup>22</sup> On the face of it, the question of how Christ is really present in the Eucharist (endemic in the West from at least the ninth century), and the question of how the Eucharist represents Christ’s redemptive sacrifice, demand two different types of metaphysical analyses: the present and the represented. Yet this distinction ultimately proves unsatisfying, since in the best patristic thinkers (and the best mystics throughout history and in all traditions) the Christ of the Eucharist is simultaneously present as crucified and risen, the sacrifice represented as past and present.

The medieval differentiation between real and symbolic presence has sometimes been seen as a philosophical decline from the patristic golden

<sup>21</sup> Philip Walker Butin, *Revelation, Redemption, and Response: Calvin’s Trinitarian Understanding of the Divine-Human Relationship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Sue A. Rozeboom, “The Provenance of John Calvin’s Emphasis on the Role of the Holy Spirit Regarding the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper” (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2010).

<sup>22</sup> Kilmartin, “The Catholic Tradition of Eucharistic Theology.”



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age.<sup>23</sup> It is probably more accurate to see this as a philosophical advance that has allowed for a great deal of epistemic progress, but in the light of the question, “is the Eucharist symbolically or really the body of Christ?” the patristic synthesis fragmented.<sup>24</sup> The philosophical accounts of transubstantiation or metaphysical presence developed to patch the philosophical gap between the church’s convictions and the new worldview, altering the ways in which the words “body of Christ” could be understood.<sup>25</sup> For Augustine, for example, there was an intrinsic and necessary link between the sacrifice of the altar and the ethical life of self-sacrifice required of individual Christians, because the Eucharist was (by its very nature) both the risen Christ and his body the church.<sup>26</sup> As a result of the fact that medieval models identified the sacrament ontologically with Christ’s historical body but only eschatologically with the ecclesial body, Catholic treatments of the link between the Eucharist and ethics today struggle to escape the notion that the Eucharist is “merely” formative. Nor is this problem limited to the modern era or the Roman communion.<sup>27</sup>

No medieval, modern, or postmodern metaphysics of presence is adequate to accommodate the multiplicity of eucharistic images that had emerged already within the first two centuries of celebration and reflection.<sup>28</sup> The image of the Eucharist as embodied incorporation into the body of Christ was soteriologically central in the early church, and this image is notoriously resistant to Aristotelian and other metaphysical models. Yet this image of being made “one body with Christ” is more crucial to Christian faith than any explanation of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist. Conversely, models of Christ’s presence that impede Christians from visibly forming one body are not eucharistic, even if they seem to explain

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Kilmartin, *The Eucharist in the West*.

<sup>24</sup> See Chapter 2 for a treatment of this history.

<sup>25</sup> Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages: Historical Survey*, trans. Laurence Paul Hemming and Susan Frank Parsons, Faith in Reason (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

<sup>26</sup> Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, ed. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 10.6; Augustine, *Essential Sermons*, ed. Daniel Edward Doyle, trans. Edmund Hill, *The Works of Saint Augustin: Part III, Homilies* (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1990), sermons 228–30.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Benjamin Durheim, *Christ’s Gift, Our Response: Martin Luther and Louis-Marie Chauvet on the Connection between Sacraments and Ethics* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015); Katharine Mahon, *Teach Us to Pray: The Lord’s Prayer, Catechesis, and Ritual Reform in the Sixteenth Century* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2019).

<sup>28</sup> Bradshaw and Johnson, *The Eucharistic Liturgies*.

divine presence in the eucharistic elements. What we need is not more precise language but rather philosophical and theological bridges that can lead us to understand, appreciate, and receive one another's eucharistic traditions.

Some of the richness of the church's traditioning about its eucharistic practice has been sacrificed in theological literature, not only since the Reformation but even during the Middle Ages, in order to seek answers to particular questions. At the same time, some of that tradition has been preserved in mysticism and spirituality, in Christian practices, and in Judaism. Now that our contemporary philosophical milieu has preprepared Christians to accommodate a rich and diverse variety of perspectives within truth, even truth about God, the time is ripe to hear once again the testimonies we eliminated in the mistaken search for a single truth. To do so does not mean we need to give up on the truths we have – at such cost – preserved.

Readers of science fiction often quote Ursula K. Le Guin's famous introduction to *The Left Hand of Darkness*: "The purpose of a thought-experiment, as the term was used by Schrodinger and other physicists, is not to predict the future . . . but to describe reality, the present world. Science fiction is not predictive; it is descriptive." Le Guin grapples with the same questions I do here: "Our philosophers, some of them, would have us agree that a word (sentence, statement) has value only in so far as it has one single meaning, points to one fact which is comprehensible to the rational intellect, logically sound, and – ideally – quantifiable." As a result, she concludes, "I am an artist . . . and therefore a liar. Distrust everything I say. I am telling the truth."<sup>29</sup> Liturgy, too, tells the truth by blurring the boundaries between what is and what should be – indeed, what should be becomes what *will be* in the liturgy; the Kingdom already accomplished in Christ comes near even as we lament what is not yet come about in our hearts and our institutions.

Ecumenical histories cannot eliminate the damage done by schisms and oppression in theological disputes. The Lund liturgy offers an example of a history infused with empathy, solidarity, thanksgiving, and lament.<sup>30</sup> As science fiction narrates the future to describe the present, ecumenical history narrates the past to open up our present toward God's future. For example, it creates an opportunity for Luther's critiques of and Trent's

<sup>29</sup> Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980).

<sup>30</sup> Liturgical Task Force of the Lutheran–Roman Catholic Commission on Unity, "Common Prayer."