

# KING'S THEOLOGICAL REVIEW

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35. Cf. M. Wiles, *The Remaking of Christian Doctrine*, S.C.M. (1974), p. 38.

36. The point is well made in a comment on the rejection of the doctrine of *avatar* (descent, incarnation) in Sikh theism:

'Belief in avatar would suggest to Sikhs not a caring God, who restores order when the need arises but a casual one who lets things slide and then is compelled reluctantly to intervene' (W.O. Cole and P.S. Sambhi, *The Sikhs*, R.K.P. (1978), p.95)

37. It is less 'supernaturalistic' than the alternative and therefore arguably more Protestant than Catholic

—cf. Paul Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought*, S.C.M. (1968), pp. 192f. A similar interventionist/non-interventionist contrast arises in our understanding of revelation. This can be analysed in an 'interventionist' manner, with God deciding to reveal himself to Moses in this particular way, at this particular time. Alternatively, we may speak of Moses's 'discovery of', 'experience of' or 'response to', the God who is always and everywhere revealing as much of himself as he can (in so far as we can speak of divine 'revelation' in abstraction from the human appropriation of it). On both analyses, we should note, the initiative remains with God's self-disclosure.

## CHURCH, EUCHARIST AND VATICAN II

Nicholas Paxton

"One of the results of recent developments in theology and in the understanding of the Church is that almost all those who are concerned with these matters agree in the view that worship is the centre of the Church's life. There is a sound theological basis for this view, as a result both of the findings of New Testament scholars and also of the careful re-consideration of the nature of worship"<sup>1</sup>

These words of the Lutheran theologian Wilhelm Hahn, written in 1959, may have been an accurate description of the Lutheran Church's view of itself at that time; but they can hardly be said to have described most of the ecclesiology found in Roman Catholicism in the preceding century. On the contrary, the main thrust of the First Vatican Council's idea of the Church was to emphasise the teaching authority and hierarchical importance of the body of Bishops, with the Pope at their head; and, when R.C. Canon Law was finally codified into a book of 2414 canons (promulgated in 1917), the prevailing vision of the Church was very much a juridical one, of an ecclesial institution governed along lines based ultimately on Roman Law. Typical of this was its division into clerics, Religious and lay persons—the last-named being very negatively defined as those who were not clerics or members of Religious Orders. This view led, not only to the heavily clerically-

orientated outlook found in Roman Catholicism between the Vatican Councils, but also to a very passive view of the eucharist as something which the president celebrated while everyone else just looked on and, if they wished, said their private prayers. Such a position led in turn to an idea of receiving Communion as an almost exclusively self-and-Christ encounter, to the great detriment of any awareness in most people of the communitarian aspects of the Church's life and worship.

It is from this situation that one is, thankfully, (i) able to trace the new vision which has emerged over the past half-century, and especially at Vatican II, of the Church as (ii) the New People of God, (iii) the sacramental body of believers, of whose activity (iv) the eucharist is the summit, and which is (v) animated by the Holy Spirit. Lastly I propose to offer some reflections on how the local Church may best be made aware of itself through the eucharist and on where the future may lead us—where Christ, the Head, may lead his ecclesial Body.

### *Developments before Vatican II*

So first we would do well to see how it was that the juridical ecclesiology of "the Church as authority-structure" of the preceding century came by stages to be developed into the more open ecclesiology of "the Church as communion of the faithful" of Vatican II. For the Church is not just an organisational institution but a

dynamic society (hence the New Testament metaphors, such as "Body of Christ" and "Bride" which refer to it as a living entity); and the realisation of the real place of the eucharist in its life, as the sharing in that banquet of Christ's self-emptying (from which the Church draws its life by participation) is naturally central to this view of its nature and task.

In the first half of the present century the Belgian theologian Emile Mersch was at pains to emphasise the Mystical Body of Christ as the basic model for any meaningful theology of the Church; while the eucharist moved somewhat nearer to the centre of ecclesial life as a result of the work of Pope Pius X, who encouraged a degree of participation by the assembly in restoring the chant and (more particularly) by encouraging the baptised to receive Communion frequently. The latter was important in that it helped to re-associate the eucharistic celebration and the reception of Communion in the minds of most Roman Catholics; for the mediaeval decline in the frequency of receiving Communion plus the later abuse of distributing it from pre-consecrated species outside the eucharistic celebration had produced a very remote view of Christ's eucharistic presence in most people's lives, with a consequent emphasis on personal devotion to the sacramental presence in the species without receiving it. This meant that the Church's corporate awareness of itself as the company of believers gave way in practice to a near-exclusive emphasis on the primacy of the religious experience of the individual, as interpreted in a "verticalist" self-and-God sense such as to minimise any realisation of the Church as other than institutional.

The major pre-Vatican II advance, however, came in Pius XII's papacy, with the promulgation of two important documents—the "ecclesiological encyclical" *Mystici Corporis* of 1943, and the "liturgical encyclical" *Mediator Dei* of 1947. In the former, Pius was careful to emphasise that "in the true assembly of Christian believers there is only one Body, one Spirit, one Lord and one Baptism"—in fine, a unity in the Church, with the Holy Spirit as its soul; while in the latter he stressed Christ's presence in the mysteries of the Church and so stated clearly that the liturgy is a public event, "the

whole public worship of the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, namely of its Head and of its members". Hence the participation of all the baptised in the priesthood of Christ is such that the eucharist is offered by the ministerial priest together with the people, who by their baptism are appointed to the worship of God and so spiritually unite themselves with the president at the eucharist.

This theme of the Church as a sacramental communion was taken up by such well-known theologians as Rahner, de Lubac and Yves Congar; and the implications of the Church's unity with and in Christ were drawn out carefully and systematically by the French theologian Jerome Hamer in his important (if undeservedly little-known) book, published in the same year as Vatican II opened, and titled "The Church is a Communion". (While this statement has since become a theological platitude, it was not so in most R.C. circles in 1962). Hamer was careful to stress both the vertical and the horizontal elements in the idea of Church-as-communion. Whereas the horizontal dimension would simply denote friendship within a body of individuals (and so, with reference to the eucharist, mere table-fellowship), it is the vertical aspect which is special to the Church—namely, Christ's life given to us by means of the Holy Spirit, who in turn shows himself through grace-infused personal relationships of charity within the Christian community. It is within this framework that we can go on to consider how the Second Vatican Council preached the Church as the New People, the New Israel, of God.

#### *The Church as People of God*

Although the idea of the Church as "People of God" may at first sight appear exclusivist as regards those who have not been baptised into Christ's death and resurrection, yet we have always to remember that the Biblical plan of salvation has always been set in the context of a people. God the Father chose the People of Israel, made them his own, and showered his loving-kindness upon them. So, too, Christ as Messiah has called people to make up the New People of God, the Church, of which the purpose is to share in his life and so, in presenting him to mankind, to be the sign and instrument

of the bearing of the Good News to humanity in all generations; for everyone is called to belong to this New People, or New Israel, of God<sup>2</sup>. As a result the Church must both pray and work to bring all people to Christ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, through whose ever-continuing action God makes us holy, not just as individuals but by bringing us into that single People of God which recognises and serves him in truth and holiness—and, in the communal eucharist, the Holy Spirit is poured out in abundance upon God's people as the sign of that love for us which made Christ obedient even to death. It is thus through the eucharist, as well as through the other sacraments and through our personal experience of God, that we receive (together, as one People) what the Council's *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)* terms "the Call of the whole Church to Holiness". For, in virtue of having received baptism, it is evident that "all the faithful of Christ, of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and the perfection of charity"<sup>3</sup>. The Council's *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium)* was equally emphatic about

this vocation when it affirmed, with regard to the eucharist, that the congregation should be "instructed by God's word and refreshed at the table of the Lord's body . . . through Christ the Mediator, they should be drawn daily into ever closer union with God and with each other, so that finally God may be all in all"<sup>4</sup>. Thus each eucharistic assembly is a local convocation of that People of God which is not just called to be holy but which is enabled to grow in holiness by its sharing in the eucharist. The New People of God was initially called to holiness by the salvific events of Christ's incarnation, death and resurrection, which have inaugurated the Kingdom of God which will be consummated in glory at the end of time. In between these two termini, the progress of man's redemption is going on, and the purpose of the Church on earth is to be the sign of God's kingdom and of its future glorious completion. Therefore the Church must clearly be a true and dynamic sign, which is why the Church is called to make up a holy community which accomplishes the fullness of its purpose in the eucharist and which, as sign of the grace of salvation, can be said to possess sacramentality of itself.

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### *The Church as Sacrament*

The Church can truly be called a sacrament insofar as a sacrament is described by the Council of Trent as “a symbol of a sacred thing and a visible form of an invisible grace”<sup>5</sup>. This theme of the Church’s sacramentality was taken up at Vatican II in the opening paragraph of *Lumen Gentium*, which states that “by her relationship with Christ, the Church is a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind. She is also an instrument for the achievement of such union and unity”. More emphatically, article 9 of the same Constitution describes how “God has gathered together as one all those who in faith look upon Jesus as the author of salvation and the source of unity and peace, and has established them as the Church, that for each and all she may be the visible sacrament of this saving unity”. So, just as the Risen Christ (the primordial sacrament) is the sacrament of the Father, the Church is the sacrament of Christ as means of salvation offered to all. The outward sign of the Kingdom is formed by the visible body of believers, and the invisible grace is, of course, the inheritance of the saving Kingdom itself. The Church is enabled to preach and transmit the Good News of salvation through the baptismal sharing of its members in Christ’s messianic task—for it is our common incorporation into Christ which is the great principle of unity, and we are the living parts of the Church as Christ’s Body. In the words of Augustine, Christ “wished to prefigure us, his Body, in that Body in which he died, rose from the dead and ascended into Heaven; so that, where the Head has gone before, the members might hope to follow”<sup>6</sup>. The Church is thus the complement of Christ, since he is the Head and the Church the mystical Body (of which the soul is the Holy Spirit, the fruit of the love between the Father and the Son, animating the mystical Body by indwelling, and uniting us in the communion of saints with each other and with Christ). As the Body of Christ, the Church on earth is bound to seek the things of heaven—as *Lumen Gentium* (art. 6) puts it: “The Church on earth . . . seeks and experiences those things which are above . . . where the life of the Church is hidden with Christ in God”. And it is especially in the liturgy that Christ is present in the Church<sup>7</sup>; for, in the

Christian faith, true worship is only possible through God’s self-revelation in Christ resulting in the believer’s transformation in Christ. Within the different forms of liturgy, it is supremely in the eucharist that the Church as Body of Christ is cohered and made aware of its nature and mission, for (as art. 7 of *Lumen Gentium* notes), “truly partaking of the Body of the Lord in the breaking of the eucharistic Bread, we are taken up into communion with him and with one another”. So it is clearly the liturgy, and especially the eucharist, which holds primacy among the different activities of the Church.

### *The Liturgy as Summit of the Church’s Activity*

Hence “the liturgy is the summit towards which the activity of the Church is directed”<sup>8</sup> because it demonstrates the unity in Christ of the gathered assembly. Within the liturgy it is the eucharist which should have pride of place; because, when the bread is broken and given to the communicants, their unity in Christ is not just demonstrated by their receiving it together, but also effected by their receiving the sacramental presence of Christ. It is primarily in the eucharist that we also become aware both of the presence of God’s Kingdom of salvation and of its progress towards the Last Days, and of the diversity of vocations and ministries in the one ecclesial Body; for the celebration is the action both of Christ and of the Kingdom People of God assembled each according to his own proper standing within that People, so that everyone fulfils his own function within the celebration and so benefits spiritually by it. In the present Roman Rite we have (at least in principle) a return to the practice of the early Roman Church, in which the involvement of different ministers in the eucharist was increased by dividing up the eucharistic functions among a large number of people—the president (when possible, the Bishop), concelebrants, deacons and then the other orders and ministries acolytes, lectors, doorkeepers etc.). In that type of assembly there was therefore a hierarchical unity and everyone had a ministry, for even those who did not hold any specific office had their share in the offering of the gifts and in the sign of peace. The R.C. Church needs to be seen to return to the practice of this principle, so that it can be emphasised to the people that, “taking

part in the eucharistic sacrifice, which is the fount and apex of the whole Christian life, they offer the divine Victim to God, and offer themselves along with It"<sup>9</sup>. For a contribution to the proper and active participation of the whole assembly is the right and duty of every Christian in consequence of his baptism; and such participation in turn shows and strengthens the faith of the Church. As *Sacrosanctum Concilium* stresses in art. 26, "liturgical services are not private functions, but are celebrations of the Church, which is 'the sacrament of unity'—namely, a holy people"—a people of which the holiness is most fully demonstrated at the eucharist, in which the sealing of the New Covenant in Christ's Body and Blood is made present to the Church and thus unites us in communion with Christ and with each other. It is in the eucharist that we reach the highest earthly fulfilment of our call to be "like living stones built into a spiritual house" (cf. 1 Pet. 2, 5). For the eucharist is not just the representation of Christ's actions at the Last Supper; it is also the renewal of the Church's incorporation into Christ as it approaches him in faith and charity and in the hope of heaven, regarding which the eucharist is the foretaste of the messianic banquet; and the Church is made holy by being filled with the Spirit of Christ as it enters into sacramental communion with him.

#### *Eucharist and Holy Spirit*

We therefore need to consider briefly the aspect of the eucharist as gathering of the faithful under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In the eucharist we make of ourselves the "living sacrifice" of Rom. 12, 1. Yet this would be just a human, commemorative act without the action of the Holy Spirit, who makes worship the divine action animating the community and enables us to "speak the word of God with boldness" as the apostles did in Acts 4, 31. The apostolic Church was deeply aware of the Spirit's presence in its liturgical assemblies; and this awareness was taken up at Vatican II, when *Lumen Gentium* declared that "the Holy Spirit was sent on the day of Pentecost in order that he might forever sanctify the Church, and thus all believers would have access to the Father through Christ in the one Spirit" (art. 4). It

went on to say that "such is especially the case in the sacred liturgy, where the power of the Holy Spirit acts upon us through sacramental signs" (art. 50). In the eucharist, the Church (endowed with the Holy Spirit) demonstrates the Spirit's presence and potentially carries through the consequences of that presence in its work for the world. Thus the eucharist contains not only the re-presentation of Christ's *kenosis* and hence the source of our redemption, but also the gift of the Holy Spirit which is the result of that *kenosis* and the effect of that redemption. So, every time the eucharist is celebrated, the Spirit is present to the assembly and received by it, if its members will but be open to him. What else are the epicleses of the eucharistic prayers for, if not to ask for the sending of the Holy Spirit to sanctify both the eucharistic elements and the eucharistic assembly? Moreover, where there is communion with Christ in the sacramental species there is also *koinonia*, inspired by the Holy Spirit, among the congregation.

#### *Local Church and Eucharistic Assembly*

But what do we mean by "congregation"? Do we use the word to refer to the local Church or only to those present at an individual eucharist? In this connection we need to note that there are two concepts of "congregation": either we use the word to refer to the local Christian brotherhood as the body of believers in a particular place, or else we use it to denote the particular worshipping assembly as actualising the ecclesial Body of Christ in that place. The difference between the two ideas is the same as that between the concepts of *Gesellschaft* (company, society) and *Gemeinschaft* (community, group), and should be borne in mind. The parish community can be defined as the number of church members living in a particular territorial area. While, by that token, it does "represent the visible Church as it is established throughout the world"<sup>10</sup>, we also have to remember that it may well fall into a number of different groups with very little in common (though it must be admitted that the parish structure will normally provide a stable, if disparate, local assembly for the eucharist). So in many large parishes it may be necessary to subdivide the parish community into several

smaller eucharistic assemblies in order to allow people to become properly aware of their common role as sharers in the eucharist. When this has to happen (if, for any reason, it is impossible to establish a worshipping bond between all the parishioners) then the relationship of the members within the different groups should be emphasised as representing, for them, their relationship to the whole local Church, just as the entire parish community represents the local Church's relationship to the universal one.

In one way, the eucharistic assembly is a much more "open" entity than the parish: for all baptised and communicant church members, irrespective of whether or not they belong to the territorial parish, can be made welcome at the eucharistic celebration. Therefore the liturgical assembly is well placed to actualise itself as the Body of Christ in a particular time and place; and, in view of this, we can see that the ongoing process of the liturgy's renewal must constantly be directed at cohering the Christian community (and hence the local Church in every parish) into a Body aware of itself as proclaiming its faith and witness and as translating these into action. It is with this in mind that we can finally assess how we can best bring people from now on to an awareness of the eucharist as central to ecclesial life.

### *Into the Future*

The 1980 Report *The Easter People*, issued by the R.C. Bishops of this country after the National Pastoral Congress, has reaffirmed that "the liturgy is not private but to be shared, not the worship of individuals but the united prayer of a whole people . . . it follows therefore that the Mass is the supreme expression of what the Church is and the source of all that the Church does"<sup>11</sup>. For the liturgy must not be an end but a beginning to the Church's appreciation of itself as a communion, both on the local and on the universal levels; its sharing in its eucharistic Lord must, if it is to be authentic sharing, lead to a new response to the call to Christian witness and mission, not merely by those who feel particularly attracted to putting these into some particular form of practice but by all those who are partakers in the eucharist. But what form will the body of partakers in the

eucharist take? The problem for all Christian communities in the modern Western world is the lack of cohesion in urban societies—and, with the decline in the number of clergy as full-time upbuilders of the Christian fellowship, the repercussions of this problem for the Church are going to get worse. Therefore the priest will have to cater for several smaller groups, each of which will be able of itself to engender a *koinonia* among its members. However, this will place an obvious strain on an already depleted clergy, so that further consideration will have to be given to the idea of more "part-time" priests, who will maintain their work in other occupations while ministering to the sacramental and pastoral needs of the rest of the People of God. Vatican II, far from excluding this, clearly maintained the possibility of such ministry together with an obvious emphasis on the primacy of the ministerial vocation in every priest: for "all priests are sent forth as co-workers . . . whether they are engaged in a parochial or supra-parochial ministry, whether by manual labour they share the lot of the workers themselves . . . all indeed are united in the single goal of building up Christ's Body, a work requiring manifold roles and new adjustments, especially nowadays"<sup>12</sup>. The growth of priests working in other occupations and simultaneously joining in building up the Kingdom of God clearly requires more consideration.

This decline in full-time ministers also means that all communicant Christians will have to be aware of the vital importance of evangelising others by giving the example of the true living-out of the Christian faith in all its aspects; so that, just as the liturgy is the summit of the Church's life, all other forms of Christian activity may be seen to flow from it. If the Church's worship is to have any credibility to the rest of the world, this must happen. Just as merely passive presence at the eucharist with no involvement is intolerable, so is an unwillingness to allow our participation in the Body of Christ to lead us to do the works of Christ. For it is from the fact of our redemption in Christ that all else flows, and it is the eucharistic re-presentation of the work of our redemption which is distinctive to the followers of Christ. To put it another way: the three elements of

the theologico-spiritual life correspond, as Gabriel Hebert has pointed out<sup>13</sup>, to von Hugel's distinction between the historical-institutional, the intellectual and the mystical elements in religion and its practice. But, whereas the glory of religious experience is found, in one form or another, in all world religions, the core of the Christian faith lies in the raising of mankind to the highest possible level in the salvific sacrifice of Jesus; and it is in the liturgy that we are brought to our closest awareness of sharing in that redemption with our fellow-Christians.

The realisation of this fact is far from being a distinctively Roman Catholic phenomenon, for John Wesley, writing in 1765, was quite clear in stating: "I advise you to lose no opportunity of attending the services of the Church, of receiving the Lord's Supper"<sup>14</sup>; and Pusey, representing another school of thought, also exhorted his congregation that "were this gift of God in his Sacrament better loved, and so better understood.. people would desire weekly, and they who had weekly would... desire daily"<sup>15</sup> and in doing so would become

more aware of their unity in Christ, with each other, and with the Church in that Heaven of which the eucharist is the foretaste.

It is towards Heaven, the fullness of the Kingdom, that the ecclesial Body of Christ must forever press, especially through its sharing in his eucharistic Body. What will the Church do in the future, especially with regard to the eucharist? What it must do is continually to develop in itself the quality which Augustine called "walking onward" towards the glory of the heavenly Kingdom. "There is praise to God there, and there is praise to God here; but here it is offered by the anxious, there by the secure. . . here on the way, there in the homeland . . . Sing and walk onward. What is it, 'to walk'? Advance, go on in virtue. For there are those, according to the Apostle [i.e. Paul] who progress to what is worse. So you, if you progress, walk onward; but go onward in virtue, go onward in noble faith. go onward in good ways; Sing—and walk onward"<sup>16</sup>. In every activity of the Church on earth, and most of all in every eucharist, the heart of its life in Christ, let us make that our unwavering hope and our constant prayer.

#### NOTES

1. Wilhelm Hahn, *Worship and Congregation* (English edn., London, Lutterworth Press, 1963), p.60.
2. cf. Vatican II, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium* , hereafter L.G.) article 13.
3. *ibid.*, art. 40.
4. Vatican II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, hereafter S.C.), art. 48.
5. Trent, *Decree on the Most Holy Eucharist*, art. 3.
6. Augustine, *Enarr.* on Ps. 51, 2.
7. cf. L.G., art. 7; *ibid.*, art. 11.
8. S.C., art. 10.

9. L.G., art. 11.
10. S.C., art. 42.
11. Report *The Easter People* (Slough, St Paul Publications, 1980), art. 59, pp.23-4.
12. Vatican II, *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests (Presbyterorum Ordinis)*, art. 8.
13. cf. A.G. Hebert, *Liturgy and Society* (London, Faber & Faber, 1961 edn.), p. 112.
14. John Wesley, *Letters*; IV, 303 (to Alexander Knox).
15. E.B. Pusey, P.S. III, 345, Sermon XV.
16. Augustine, *Sermo* 256.