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Pastor, Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception,
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Compassionate Christ, Compassionate People

Liturgical Foundations of
Christian Spirituality

Bob Hurd

Foreword by
Michael Downey



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It will become apparent to the reader that the primary intellectual influences on this book are Karl Rahner and Louis-Marie Chauvet. In their different ways, each has provided a theological framework for drawing together my own thought along with that of other favorite authors whose writings have nourished me. I am grateful to them all, but especially these two. As a young professor I had the opportunity to meet and interview Karl Rahner at Marquette University's celebration of his seventy-fifth birthday. At that time, I was able to express my personal thanks for how his work has deepened my faith. Similarly, I hope this book may serve as an expression of gratitude to Louis-Marie Chauvet.

Foreword

“A voice like the color of honey.” Never mind the mixed metaphor. These are the words I whispered nearly forty years ago when I first heard liturgical composer and musician Bob Hurd sing. The sound was clean and translucent, sweet and invigorating, moving and stilling, penetrating, yes, piercing, but soothing like a balm for the wounded heart.

For forty years and more, Bob Hurd has been composing and singing, spending countless hours in the recording studio, conducting workshops and giving classes, serving the life of parishes and local churches through liturgical ministry. All the while he has gained recognition and a well-deserved reputation throughout the English-speaking world and beyond as one of the finest liturgical musicians of his generation. Occasionally he has found the time to write a scholarly article or an essay on a topic of interest to those who serve the liturgical life of the churches “on the ground.”

Since the late 1970s, as many liturgists and liturgical musicians have grown weary to the point of despair in the face of so many obstacles barring the full flowering of the liturgical renewal occasioned by the orientations of the Second Vatican Council, Bob Hurd has kept calm and carried on. Through it all, he would give hints of his dream to write a book on liturgical spirituality. This is it! Bob Hurd’s first book.

In circles of liturgical ministry and music, what is not well known is that Bob Hurd was for a number of years a student and a teacher of philosophy. His doctorate in philosophy was focused on the thought of Karl Rahner. This equipped him to pursue his interests in theology, Christology, sacramental theology, liturgy, and spirituality. In teaching a wide range of courses in theology and related disciplines over many years, he has proven to be a careful, reflective, systematic thinker, always attentive to the practical implications of systems of thought,

be they classical, medieval, modern, or contemporary. In *Compassionate Christ, Compassionate People*, Bob Hurd brings insights from Scripture, theology, philosophy, the Catholic liturgical tradition—as well as an admirable familiarity with the liturgical practices of other Christian churches—to bear on the task of laying the liturgical foundations of Christian spirituality. Of singular importance here is the theological anthropology and Christology of Karl Rahner, as well as the work of the contemporary sacramental theologian Louis-Marie Chauvet.

It is commonplace to hear that the liturgy is the source and summit of Christian life (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 10). Properly understood, this is inclusive of every dimension of the Christian life, especially the spiritual life, life in Christ's Spirit, or spirituality. Since the Second Vatican Council, liturgy as source and summit has been repeatedly asserted and affirmed. But rarely has it been explored and explained in a comprehensive and systematic fashion. This is what Bob Hurd sets out to do here. The key to his understanding of the liturgical foundations of Christian spirituality is the *kenosis*, the ongoing self-emptying of God in Christ through the gift of the Spirit of God enlightening, enlivening, guiding, and healing the church, nurturing and sustaining it as the Body of the compassionate Christ, whose members are to be and become a compassionate people in and for the world.

While this may be his first book, Bob Hurd is no novice. After years of study and reflection, prayer and practice, composing music through which he puts words and melodies in people's hearts so that they can open their lips and lift their voices to God in unison, what we have here is the mature work of a quiet scholar who has helped the church to sing rightly—prayerfully, joyfully, heartfully, indeed contemplatively—to the God whose name, beyond all naming, is self-emptying Love. He teaches us words of thanks, praise, lament, forgiveness, mercy, and wonder. He invites us to pause to hear the rhythms of silence. Here we are summoned to participate in the self-emptying of God in Christ in our living, in our worship, in our dying, and in our death. Whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord (Rom 14:8) whose cup runneth over with a fullness that is self-emptying. From that cup we are invited to drink in the mellifluous timbre of these pages.

Michael Downey

Prologue

Before Mystery—An Evocation

We live “the life of a village against the life of the stars,” Thornton Wilder wrote in the preface for his play *Our Town*.¹ This is the life of everyday happenings: an early morning birth, households awakening to a new day, the arrival of the milkman and the morning paper, breakfast, the daily journey to school and work, returning home at day’s end, sitting down to dinner, having an argument, making love, dying.² But generation after generation, these mundane events are played out against the vast horizon of the stars, Wilder’s symbol for the eternal.

Visits to Roman archeological sites during his student days gave Wilder a vivid sense of the temporal over against the eternal, of finite human existence against the horizon of infinite mystery. And so, across *Our Town* there are moments in which we are led from everyday village life into the mystery, partly in religious language, partly as a question always confronting human beings.³ The eternal is always on the brink of peeking through, which is to say that our consciousness

¹ Thornton Wilder, “A Preface for *Our Town*,” in *Thornton Wilder: Collected Plays and Writings on the Theater* (New York: The Library of America, 2007), 659.

² *Ibid.*, 657.

³ Wilder’s writing reflects both his religious upbringing and modernity’s doubts concerning religious faith. He described his religious background to an interviewer as follows: “I came from a very strict Calvinistic father, was brought up partly among missionaries in China, and went to that splendid college at Oberlin at a time when the classrooms and student life carried a good deal of pious didacticism which would now be called narrow Protestantism.” Cited by J. D. McClatchy in his foreword to Thornton Wilder’s *Heaven’s My Destination* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), xviii. Around the time he wrote *Our Town* he had read Nietzsche but also described himself

somehow reaches not only the mundane but the eternal, not only the ordinary things of life but transcendent mystery.

In act 1, teenager George Gibbs is falling in love with Emily Webb, the girl next door. In the evening, he and his younger sister, Rebecca, are looking at the night sky. Though looking at the far-away moon, George's thoughts focus on something as close as the girl next door. Gazing at the same moon, young Rebecca's thoughts reach out to the eternal:

REBECCA: I never told you about that letter Jane Crofut got from her minister when she was sick. He wrote Jane a letter and on the envelope the address was like this: It said: Jane Crofut; The Crofut Farm; Grover's Corners; Sutton County; New Hampshire; United States of America.

GEORGE: What's funny about that?

REBECCA: But listen, it's not finished: the United States of America; Continent of North America; Western Hemisphere; the Earth; the Solar System; the Universe; the Mind of God—that's what it said on the envelope.

GEORGE: What do you know!

REBECCA: And the postman brought it just the same.

GEORGE: What do you know!⁴

Rebecca is awed by the minister's tracing of earthly and cosmic realities back to their source in the mind of God. But the "mind of God" is clearly not another object lying alongside Grover's Corners, the earth, the solar system, and the universe. Though in Rebecca's telling God appears as the last item in a series, that little word "in," implied in the address (*in* the mind of God), shows that something else is going on. She has climbed up the ladder of beings and found God, not as the final rung, but beyond the entire ladder. There is a leap from a whole chain of conditioned, finite things to their Unconditioned Source. God is not another "thing" in the cosmos; rather, the cosmos and all things are *in* God. In highly abbreviated form, she is

as being "under the shadow of Whitehead's philosophy—Christian—Platonic." Cited by Penelope Niven in *Thornton Wilder: A Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 2012), 428.

⁴ *Our Town*, in *Thornton Wilder: Collected Plays*, 173.

tracing out the God-ward dynamism of the human heart and mind when its questioning is allowed to run its full course—the ascent to God through the things of the world: this town, this continent, this earth, this solar system, this universe—the mind of God.

George, staring at the same moon, takes a different route. He is awakening to his love for Emily Webb, the girl next door. Instead of carrying him into the cosmos, this love carries him into courtship, marriage, the birth of their first child, and, tragically, the loss of his young wife in second childbirth. His experience of giving himself completely to another, someone who is fragile and can be lost, is also an encounter with the mystery of the eternal. For when we run up against the limits of our finitude, the question of the infinite opens up, as does the question of the abiding value of our earthly commitments. On their wedding day in act 2, Emily tells George that all she wants is for him to love her, adding: “And I mean for *ever*. Do you hear? For ever and ever.”⁵ Now that she is gone, does his love for her have anything like eternal validity? If so, where is this eternity, this “for ever and ever”? Wilder described *Our Town* as “an attempt to find a value above all price for the smallest events in our daily life.”⁶ In what would such a value beyond all price be grounded? Is there a Love beyond all loves in which they rest and have their ultimate value? Is there in all our loves, finally, an experience of longing for one knows not what, so that, as C. S. Lewis said, “we remain conscious of a desire which no natural happiness will satisfy”?⁷

George’s experience corresponds less to the dynamism of knowing than to the dynamism of freedom and love, that self-donation in which one gives oneself with all one’s heart to another. Such love is an act of the heart and the will, affectivity and volition. For to value, to love, is to extend oneself toward another, willing the good of the beloved. This dynamism of the heart has an ethical trajectory as well, because one can give oneself in love more broadly to the welfare of others, to values such as truth, justice, and compassion, and even to the point of risking and sacrificing one’s life. Where do we get the sense that finite actions in relation to finite objects or goals have infinite seriousness and eternal validity?

⁵ Ibid., 192.

⁶ Thornton Wilder, “Preface to Three Plays” in *Collected Plays*, 686.

⁷ C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 32.

In act 3, the Stage Manager, a character in the play, conducts the audience on a tour of the town cemetery, naming those buried there. Once again, there is a sense of our relation to a mystery beyond ourselves:

Now there are some things we all know, but we don't take 'em out and look at 'em very often. We all know that *something* is eternal. And it ain't houses and it ain't names, and it ain't earth, and it ain't even the stars . . . everybody knows in their bones that *something* is eternal, and that something has to do with human beings. All the greatest people ever lived have been telling us that for five thousand years and yet you'd be surprised how people are always losing hold of it. There's something way down deep that's eternal about every human being.⁸

In a sense yet to be explored, everyone knows the eternal, yet everyone is prone to lose sight of it. This is the ambiguous terrain on which spirituality is lived—the persistence of mystery, the tendency to “lose hold of it,” and the resolve to dwell *with* it intentionally.

The ending of the play delivers us from the village back to the stars, that vast horizon surrounding all human affairs. But we now know that the stars are but sentinels of an eternity that transcends them. And this eternity is somehow related to human beings. The Stage Manager, looking up to the vault of heaven, comments on the strain of village life and the need for sleep. Straining away before the horizon of eternity—this is the life of the village against the life of the stars, the life of the human spirit in the dynamism of its knowing, willing, and loving. Now, we cannot simply live amid the stars; we need the village. But to live *only* in the village is to be less than fully human. If the human being exists as “the mid-point between time and eternity, between the world and God,”⁹ then both the village and the stars are valid concerns, and the loss of either side maims our humanity.

Having said that, the people of *Our Town* are mostly and understandably taken up with the village. Dwelling with eyes wide open at the mid-point of time and eternity is a stretch for most of us. Our

⁸ Wilder, *Our Town*, in *Collected Plays*, 196–97.

⁹ Karl Rahner, *Spirit in the World*, trans. William Dych (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 407. Rahner is paraphrasing Aquinas, who is paraphrasing the anonymous work *Liber de Causis*.

default position is to turn our backs on the Mystery and concern ourselves solely with the obvious and immediate everyday things over which we have some control. The things we cannot control—well, we leave them aside, not in the sense of honestly acknowledging our own vulnerability before them, but rather in the sense of suppression, denial, flight. This suppression can be merely practical, not so much a question of ideas in our heads, but simply how we live. We flee ultimate questions into the comfort of immediate concerns and goods, distracting ourselves until death. But such suppression can be more theoretically formulated.

When asked about his atheism, the comedian Stephen Fry flip-pantly quipped that he had no problem with other people having invisible, imaginary friends. The implication: How absurd that a person should have such an invisible and imaginary friend as God. Children play such games but eventually grow out of them. Fry is voicing Freud's suspicion that belief in God is infantile. But consider for a moment the opposite. Imagine God being a directly visible thing in the world.¹⁰ Fry wants a God as visible, say, as the neighbor next door. Or perhaps, since it is *God*, something a little more extraordinary than the neighbor next door, but visible. Then, as Kierkegaard once said, God would be related to humans directly "as the obviously extraordinary to the astonished observer."¹¹ He elaborates, suggesting that if only God would "take on the figure of a very rare and tremendously large green bird, with a red beak, sitting in a tree on the mound, and perhaps even whistling in an unheard of manner" then people would surely sit up and take notice! But could such a visible thing alongside other things in the world possibly be God? How absurd. Children can't help but think of God in this way but eventually grow out of it. No, God's presence to us must be qualitatively different from our experience of visible things and persons directly present to us in the world.

¹⁰ At this point, a Christian believer is thinking: what about Jesus? But Jesus is not God directly present *as God*, Jesus is the divinity present to us through his humanity, God mediated to us through creaturely reality. And in any case, once risen, Jesus is no longer present in an earthly, bodily way. Christ as radically mediating our experience of God is explored in chapter 4.

¹¹ Soren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968), 219.

Spirituality is a countermovement to this narrowing, suppressing tendency. It is concerned with dwelling mindfully in the tension between the village and the stars, the temporal and the eternal. It is “humanity at full stretch,” to borrow a phrase from Don Saliers.¹² This requires a certain resolve to move beyond the immediate and obvious, to own the full height and depth of one’s humanity. From the perspective of Christian faith, what we are “owning” in this case is not just our full humanity—it is our humanity *graced*. It involves our life with all its human possibilities but also the further gift of God’s life moving within us, which necessarily changes the quality of our experience.

John Dunne speaks of this graced deeper life as an “enduring life, a life that could last beyond death.” Such a life, he says, would be a life that people “have without knowing it, some current that runs far beneath the surface.” He continues:

The deeper life would be like an undertow, like a current that flows beneath the surface. . . . There is no swelling and breaking in the undertow, no foam, no splash, no sound. Yet it is a powerful current and may move in a direction opposite to that of the waves, may move toward the open sea while they move toward the shore.¹³

Wilder’s village is like the shore and his stars are like the open sea. Human knowing, willing, and loving aims at the things of everyday life but in this very movement simultaneously experiences in its depths an undertow or dynamism toward a fullness beyond everything finite—God. Further, this movement of the human spirit is heightened, elevated, magnetized by God’s moving toward us (grace). But, Dunne asks, can one really bear to live such a life? Is it not easier to retreat into the immediate and obvious things of life? Why bother with the undertow, which, in any case, might be dangerous? Living the deeper life is an adventure, a stretch, a discipline, a work—the cultivation of a self-possessed, mindful relation to the height and depth of one’s existence and all that is met with there. If God moves toward and in us, then spirituality is a responsive answer:

¹² Don E. Saliers, *Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 28.

¹³ John Dunne, *Time and Myth* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 5–6.

moving with the life of God moving within us in ongoing conversion, attunement, and practice.

A friend of mine once speculated on what a dolphin's spirituality would be like, I suppose, because of the high intelligence of this wondrous creature. How would a dolphin experience Mystery? Would it be by going down into the depths, much deeper than dolphins normally go? Would it be, instead, rising up and leaping exuberantly out of the sea? Answer: Yes!

In the end, going up and going down amount to the same thing. They are images for reaching beyond or transcending the immediacy of ordinary experience, especially ordinary experience too narrowly focused. Insofar as the Transcendent Mystery is the ground of all that is, it is "down deep," that is, immanent to creation, including the consciousness of the human creature. Insofar as this Mystery, which sustains each and every being, is not identical with any of them, it remains "above" or transcendent to them. So, our capacity for God as Mystery is engaged when we transcend or go deeper than what is immediately obvious to us in everyday experience. This transcending or going deeper applies both to Rebecca's reaching beyond the cosmos to its transcendent ground and to George's absolute love for Emily. In both cases we have the life of the village, but with an undertow or motion toward the horizon of Absolute Mystery.

The effort required is like the story of Elijah on Mount Horeb. God tells him to leave the shelter of the mountain cave because "the LORD will pass by" (1 Kgs 19:11-13). He has to leave the shelter of the cave, becoming vulnerable in the face of primal elements. The adventure of spirituality involves leaving the various shelters we construct, risking vulnerability in the face of primal mystery. Then, Elijah experiences God not in the obvious and dramatic occurrences of storm, earthquake, and fire, like Kierkegaard's astonished observer, but in "a tiny whispering sound." God is more like a tiny whispering sound surrounding our lives than some dramatic object confronting us. Dramatic events do not introduce us to this experience for the first time but rather bring it out into the open. When you wake up in the morning, you may not be focusing on the sensation in your feet—your attention is elsewhere. But when you stub your toe, a sensitivity that has been there all along becomes uppermost in your awareness!

Elijah's story resonates with another one—the call of Peter in Luke's gospel (5:1-11). Jesus tells Simon Peter to leave the shelter of

the shore and “put out into deep water” (v. 4). It is only when Peter *puts out into the deep* that he encounters the miraculous catch of fish and the mystery of God’s presence in Jesus. Spirituality is putting out into the deep. What would it mean for you and me, reader, to stand on the mountain top, listening to the “tiny whispering sound” that surrounds us, or to “put out into the deep” instead of just remaining in the shallows of our lives? What would it mean to dwell mindfully at the midpoint between time and eternity, the world and God, and to encounter there the life of God moving within us?

PART ONE

Theological Bearings: The Life of God Moving within Us

“Godself. Godself I experienced—not human words about God. . . . Indeed, I would say this: you can have the same experience too,” Karl Rahner once wrote, assuming the persona of Ignatius of Loyola.¹ Yet, here I am, reader, using *words*, and probably too many, to coax you into reflection on experiencing God. My words presume the Word made flesh; the words of Scripture, ritual, and sacrament; and the many human words of theology, philosophy, and literature responding to the paschal mystery across the centuries. This is an exercise in faith seeking understanding. For I am speaking from within Christian faith about faith and its relation to experience. And though the experience of God is more than just words—more than just *having ideas about*—still, we necessarily receive, interpret, and express these experiences in words, not just after the fact, but all along the way.

That tiny whispering sound surrounding us, that undertow in the depths of our lives, is the experience of the holy Mystery, the life of God moving within us. God’s initiative invites and opens up the possibility of our response, our partnership. We learn to move with the life of God moving within us. Led by the Spirit, we learn the steps of the sacred dance. In this movement of God within us and our response we are invited to ongoing change of heart, attunement, and practice. The more this response becomes simply who we are, the

¹ Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Writings*, ed. Philip Endean (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 38.

more we are practicing spirituality. *Moving with the life of God moving within us*—this is the understanding of spirituality that will animate these pages. As a Christian spirituality, it reaches its most explicit expression in worship, in receiving the Bread of the Word and the Bread and Cup of Christ at the table. Part 2 will explore this in detail. But God’s gracious movement within us and our response marks the whole of our lives. So, we must first reflect more deeply on what this *life of God moving within us* is. How do we experience this whisper, this undertow? Part 1 explores this experience in order to give a theological framework for our exploration of liturgical spirituality in part 2.

This experience involves several interrelated ways of sharing in God’s life. Distinctions can be made among these different sharings, though our relationship to God “is expressed completely only in and through the whole Christian message,” as Rahner says.² A line is intelligible in itself but, without ceasing to be a line, can become part of a greater reality—a square. And a square, though intelligible in itself, and without ceasing to be a square, can be taken up into a yet greater reality—a cube.³ So it is with the Christian mystery. Here, in the light of faith, we can speak of the threefold gift or way in which God moves within us: as Creator, as self-communicating Love (or grace), and as given in radical solidarity with our humanity in the Christ. These modalities of God’s life moving within us can be distinguished from each other. But in fact all three have been given and are interrelated. Let us explore each in turn.⁴

² Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 75.

³ I am indebted to C. S. Lewis for this imagery, though I am using it somewhat differently than he does. See *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 161–62.

⁴ Though I draw on many authors in part 1, it is primarily Karl Rahner’s theology that I am presenting through these materials as well as direct quotation from his writings. I want to acknowledge this indebtedness at the outset.

Chapter 1

Before the Mystery of Creation: Experiencing Our Createdness

Be still and know that I am God.

Psalm 46:10

Before a word is on my tongue, Lord,
you have known its meaning through and through.
You are with me beyond my understanding:
God of my present, my past and future, too.

Bernadette Farrell, song paraphrase of Psalm 139¹

To experience the life of God moving within us as Creator is to recognize or “know again” something so primal that it normally escapes us: our createdness, our being sustained by something beyond ourselves. I am reminded of Alec Guinness’s memoir in old age, titled, *My Name Escapes Me*.² One might just as well say, “My createdness escapes me!” It is like the story of the little fish who swims up to its mother asking, “So where is this ocean I hear so much about?”³ The most obvious thing can be the most hidden. We must make an effort to bring it to consciousness. Doing this mindfully, day by day, in meditation or prayer is practicing a spiritual discipline. It

¹ “O God, You Search Me,” Text and Music © 1992, Bernadette Farrell. Published by OCP. All rights reserved. Used with permission.

² Alec Guinness, *My Name Escapes Me* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996).

³ Thomas Keating, “Cultivating the Centering Prayer,” in M. Basil Pennington, Thomas Keating, and Thomas E. Clark, *Finding Grace at the Center: The Beginning of Centering Prayer* (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2002), 47.

is less like making something happen than removing blinders and opening ourselves to the ever-present fullness of reality in which we live and move and have our being. Then something happens to us, not of our own making. Our center of gravity shifts from ourselves alone, from our pretense of absolute autonomy, to our relationship with others, all of creation, and the Mystery that grants and holds all in being. This is not a desertion of responsible autonomy but, in the words of John Donne, knowing again that no one of us “is an island, entire to itself.”

Despite our impressive autonomy, we are not of our own making; we are existentially indebted. This illusory autonomous self, whether we formulate it philosophically or just practically live it, must die so that a truer self can live. There are many ways in which one must repeatedly lose one’s life, as Jesus says, in order to save it (Matt 17:25). This is one of them. Forgetfulness of this giftedness is the beginning of the illusory self of which Thomas Merton once wrote—illusory because it is cut off from the truth of its being:

When we seem to possess ourselves and use our being and natural faculties in a completely autonomous manner, as if our individual ego were the pure source and end of our own acts, then we are in illusion and our acts, however spontaneous they may seem to be, lack spiritual meaning and authenticity.⁴

Awakening to the giftedness of being, with gratitude and awe, is the beginning of wisdom, the beginning of having a spirituality. Such a discipline belongs above all to liturgical spirituality. The first moment of liturgical worship is not just physically assembling but “gathering” in the spiritual sense of becoming truly gathered within oneself, with other persons, with the whole of creation, with God.⁵ The ritual shift into community with God and neighbor in Christ expresses the existential and spiritual shift from being wrongly centered to being rightly centered or gathered, the shift from the false to the true self. For most, it is in worship that we first and explicitly

⁴ Thomas Merton, *Contemplative Prayer* (New York: Image/Random House, 1996), 48.

⁵ All of these relationships are mediated by our relationship to the risen One and the Spirit, but I will take this up later.

learn the language of our createdness: "In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen 1:1). In worship we learn to profess and pray to God as Creator. Most of our eucharistic prayers feature some variation on these words from Eucharistic Prayer IV:

you, who alone are good, the source of life,
have made all that is,
so that you might fill your creatures with blessings.

Do these words of the liturgy resonate with something in our experience? Does *createdness* enter into our experience of ourselves? Do we have through this some sense of the Creator? To this question, the people of Wilder's *Our Town* provide some important clues. In act 3 the Stage Manager says, "Everybody knows in their bones that *something* is eternal and that something has to do with us human beings." But in the same breath, he also says, "You'd be surprised how people are always losing hold of it."⁶ We need to explore both insights, which, taken together, say: this experience of createdness is deeply certain and yet elusive. Let's begin with knowing in our bones that our existence is gift from beyond ourselves. Chapter 2 will then address how elusive this awareness is and why we are prone to lose sight of it.

Knowing in Our Bones

What kind of knowing is this? Experiencing our createdness is not an experience of any particular thing in this world, not even the world as a whole. Yes, the ordinary things of life may awaken this experience, but it is not of *them* but of something *through* them, something more than any of them *are*. The experience of createdness outruns the things directly accessible to us in experience toward that in which all things abide. Coming back from outer space, a Russian cosmonaut said atheism is true because he did not find God "out there." He missed the point, because God *as* creative source in which all things abide cannot be another intracosmic thing alongside them. Karl Rahner puts it this way: "*That* God really does not exist who operates

⁶ Thornton Wilder, *Our Town*, in *Thornton Wilder: Collected Plays and Writings on the Theater* (New York: The Library of America, 2007), 196–97.

and functions as an individual existent alongside of other existents, and who would thus, as it were, be a member of the larger household of all reality. Anyone in search of such a God is searching for a false God.”⁷

Second, this knowing in our bones is not awareness of something that, once upon a time, initiated creation and then receded like an absentee landlord. It is an “in every moment” experience of everything, including ourselves, being granted out of a Mystery that transcends us and yet is closer to us than we are to ourselves. In other words, the existential indebtedness of all creation to its Creator does not refer to one moment in a time past but to every moment of time. “The act of bringing the world into existence,” Abraham Heschel wrote, “is a continual process. God called the world into being, and that call goes on. . . . To witness the perpetual marvel of the world’s coming into being is to sense the Giver in the given.”⁸ Though this is not the fullness of the Christian mystery, it is an experiential moment within it.

Witnessing “the perpetual marvel of the world’s coming into being” and sensing “the Giver in the given”—this is what we are seeking to lay bare. When I sit on my front porch in early morning stillness, witnessing the world emerging from silence and darkness with birdsong and the gradual lighting up of the horizon, as my past days now give way to this precious new one (how wonderful it is to be able to start afresh!), as I feel the fragility of each breath I draw—for one day I will surely draw my last breath—what leads me to sense through all this “the perpetual marvel of the world’s coming into being”? Why does the song “Morning Has Broken” ring so true, connecting this morning’s birdsong with the first birdsong of creation?⁹ After all, sunrise and birdsong happened the day before, and many

⁷ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 63; emphasis in original. At this point, a Christian believer is thinking: what about Jesus? But Jesus is not God directly present as God, Jesus is the divinity present to us through the humanity—Jesus is God mediated to us through creaturely reality.

⁸ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 100–101.

⁹ “Morning Has Broken,” Text by Eleanor Farjeon, 1881–1965, © 1957, Eleanor Farjeon. All Rights reserved. Harold Ober Assoc., Inc. Music: Trad. Gaelic Melody.

days before that as well. Yet this very morning's experience somehow says to me: in every moment existence is given anew. This givenness of things marks them as existentially indebted. Things are given; they do not give themselves to themselves. Every breath we take is in one sense an exercise of our own autonomy. But we know "in our bones" that with each breath we are living on borrowed power: "When you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust," as Psalm 104 says (NRSV).

How deep does this indebtedness go? One answer is that it goes as deep as nature. Nature is the cause of our being. Without doubt, we exist within nature and are indebted to a series of causes stretching back through all the processes that have led up to our present moment. We too easily forget that "we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. Gn 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters," as Pope Francis says in *Laudato Si'*.¹⁰ To stop here, however, is to presume that nature grants itself existence. But our sense of the sheer givenness of things includes the thing we call nature, the world, the universe. We may be stardust, but that which grants being "ain't even the stars," as Wilder's Stage Manager says.

Whatever theory one has of how past processes have led up to our present moment, these processes do not explain their own existence. Once given, they have unfolded in some manner or another. But all along the way, since they do not carry their cause of existence within themselves, they not only have to be *given* but continually *sustained*. So, foundational energy, matter, and the things to which they give rise, including time itself, are indebted in the same way. The big bang, however true it may be, doesn't explain the *existence* of something to bang; evolution, however true, doesn't explain the *existence* of something to evolve. Creation "out of nothing" is a more radical concept than causality because causality presumes something already existing to undergo change.

This "in every moment" dependence of ourselves and all creation on the Creator is perhaps best described by Herbert McCabe, who says this process is "not like a sculptor who makes a statue and leaves

¹⁰ *On Care for Our Common Home: Laudato Si'*, Encyclical Letter of the Holy Father Francis (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops/Vatican City: Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 2015), par. 2.

it alone, but like a singer who keeps her song in existence at all times.”¹¹ Dwell on that image for a moment. In every second of the song’s sounding, over its whole life span, it’s “being there” is projected by something beyond itself. Its emerging out of the silence, unfolding in the present, and future completion when its sounding ceases—in other words, it’s *being* and its *time*—all this is created and carried by something beyond itself. Once it is given, the musicologist may discern its structure, duration, the relation of intervals, tempo, and how this or that note evolves from the preceding note. But none of these account for the song’s existence. And one who looks only at these aspects of the song will not find its creative source among them. For the Singer who projects it into existence is neither the song nor some particular note within the song and yet is intimately present all along the way as its creative source. Where the song is sounding, the Singer is! Without the Singer, the song is not. Once we recognize this, we can experience the power, even the shock, of the ancient philosophical question: Why is there something rather than nothing? Things might not be at all, we might not be at all! Yet here we are. To his credit, Stephen Hawking, never shy to announce his atheism, admits that this is a question his scientific understanding can’t answer: “What is it that breathes fire into the equations and makes a universe for them to describe?”¹²

Now let us go a step further. Suppose the song has self-awareness. If the Singer-Creator is singing and upholding the song in every moment of its sounding, might not this “being created and upheld” enter into the song’s self-awareness? Not in the sense that the song would exhaustively comprehend its source, but rather in the bare sense of experiencing that it is *sourced* or given to itself out of it knows not what. Might this not be what *everybody knows in their bones*, as Wilder has it, if only they would attend to it?

The anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* and *The Book of Privy Counselling* speaks similarly. He echoes Augustine’s notion that God is closer to us than we are to ourselves. God “is your being and in him, you are what you are, not only because he is the cause and

¹¹ Herbert McCabe, *God, Christ and Us*, ed. Brian Davies (New York: Continuum, 2003), 103. Cited in Elizabeth Johnson, *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love* (New York: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2015), 123.

¹² Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time* (New York: Bantam Books, 1988), 174. Cited in Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 138.

being of all that exists, but because he is *your* cause and the deep center of *your* being.”¹³ So he bids us to “go down to the deepest point of your mind and think of yourself in this simple, elemental way . . . do not think *what you are* but *that you are*.”¹⁴ This is the purpose of centering prayer. Stepping back from everyday knowledge of everyday things, one attends to the primal feeling of *existing*. Here we encounter something deeper than our ego and its limited autonomy. Here we let go of doing and attend to being. We encounter our createdness—that we quite impressively *are* but *we are not* the fullness of Being in which we abide. Simultaneously, we experience that everything else that enters our purview is less than the fullness of being. Normally, “my createdness escapes me,” but in this contemplative act I reel it back in! In this experience of our givenness we encounter the Giver in the given. Do not shrink, says the author of the *Cloud*, “from the sweat and toil involved in gaining real self-knowledge, for I am sure that when you have acquired it you will very soon come to an experiential knowledge of God’s goodness and love.”¹⁵

As I said earlier, one can use either *going up* or *going down deep* imagery for recapturing our sense of createdness. Thomas Merton *goes up*, saying, “There exists some point at which I can meet God in a real and experimental contact with His infinite actuality. This is the ‘place’ of God, His sanctuary—it is the point where my contingent being depends upon His love. Within myself is a metaphorical apex of existence at which I am held in being by my Creator.”¹⁶ Merton then uses a striking image, reminiscent of the Singer-song relation referred to above: “God utters me like a word. . . . A word will never be able to comprehend the voice that utters it.”¹⁷ Heschel provides an interesting variation on this theme: “If an idea had the ability to think and to transcend itself, it would be aware of its being at this moment a thought of my mind.” The religious person, he continues, “has such an awareness of being known by God.”¹⁸

¹³ *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counselling*, trans. and ed. William Johnston (New York: Image/Random House, 2014), 138.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 140.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁶ Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 2007), 37.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone: A Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1976), 128.

Chapter 8

Approaching the Eucharistic Prayer

What shall I return to the LORD
for all his bounty to me?
I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the LORD.
Psalm 116:12-13 (NRSV)

This chapter addresses several preliminaries to the eucharistic prayer itself. First, we reflect on the presentation of the gifts, which anticipates the spirituality of the eucharistic prayer. Second, an initial overview of the prayer's spirituality is given. Finally, this overview leads us into three questions, two of which are answered here. The third is addressed in the next chapter.

The Presentation of the Gifts

We come to the eucharistic prayer by way of the presentation of the gifts. Though words "gifts" and "offering" are used in the Roman Rite, what Catholics once called the "offertory" is not the true offering. The true ritual offering by which we "lift up the cup" and make a return for God's goodness is within the eucharistic prayer. But here we anticipate the spirituality that marks the eucharistic prayer: welcoming the gift of God and making a return.

Both this theme and the form of the presentation prayers are indebted to Jewish table blessing (*berakah*). These prayers echo a fundamental ethical dimension in the spirituality of our Jewish brothers and sisters. It is a spirituality, Abraham Heschel says, animated by awareness that to exist is to have something asked of us: "We are

asked to wonder, to revere, to think and to live in a way that is compatible with the grandeur and mystery of living.”¹ Whether Descartes meant it this way or not, his dictum, “I think, therefore I am,” is emblematic of modernity’s wrongheaded attempt to make humans the center and measure of everything. Heschel turns this on its head: “I am commanded—therefore I am.”² To mend the world and promote human well-being—everything that Christians call the social gospel or social justice or eco-justice—this profound Jewish spirituality shapes the Christian spirituality of the presentation of the gifts and the eucharistic prayer that follows it.

Bread, wine, and provision for the poor are brought forward from the assembly. The provision for the poor is essential to the rite’s meaning, not an occasional extra. As the bread and wine are placed on the altar, two prayers are said in the Roman Catholic rite. Among several options, the Evangelical Lutheran rite has a similar prayer at this moment.³

Table 2

Roman Catholic	Evangelical Lutheran
<p>Over the Bread Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received the bread we offer you: fruit of the earth and work of human hands, it will become for us the bread of life. <i>Blessed be God for ever.</i></p> <p>Over the Cup Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received the wine we offer you: fruit of the vine and work of human hands, it will become our spiritual drink. <i>Blessed be God for ever.</i></p>	<p>After or as the Gifts Are Presented Blessed are you, O God, maker of all things. Through your goodness you have blessed us with these gifts: our selves, our time and our possessions. Use us, and what we have gathered, in feeding the world with your love, through the one who gave himself for us, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. <i>Amen</i></p>

¹ Abraham J. Heschel, *God in Search of Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1976), 113.

² Abraham J. Heschel, *Who Is Man* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1965), 111.

³ *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, Pew Edition (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 107.

Both traditions acknowledge the gift character of creation. We think we are bringing our gifts, but they are first God's gifts to us ("through your goodness we have received"). Spiritually speaking, this expresses the turn from *humans as the center* to experiencing our createdness (see chap. 1). With all other creatures we receive our being as *gift* from the Mystery in which all things abide. So, we are not initiating the gifting process but rather "making a return" (Ps 116).

Second, this ritual presentation of gifts implies an ethic. But the Catholic and Protestant versions express it differently. It is most explicit in the Lutheran prayer: "Use us, and what we have gathered in feeding the world." Its focus is less on the bread and wine, more on the ecclesial body that will be transformed for service by the Eucharist: "our selves, our time and our possessions." The other two options in the Lutheran order of worship do mention "food from the earth" (option 1) and "bread from the earth and fruit from the vine" (option 2). But here again concern is primarily with how participants will act on what they have received: "Turn our hearts toward those who hunger in any way, that all may know your care" (option 1), and "Nourish us with these gifts, that we might be for the world signs of your gracious presence" (option 2).⁴

By contrast, the Catholic prayers focus on the gifts of bread and wine that will become the sacramental presence of Christ. It is only later, after the institution narrative or consecration, that the Catholic liturgy especially emphasizes the ecclesial body—what the church as the body of Christ must be for the world. But an ethical dimension is not lacking in the Catholic presentation prayers. In the Lutheran version, it is God who "brings forth bread from the earth and fruit from the vine." The Catholic prayers explicitly connect the gifts of bread and wine with human labor. And this brings the ethical dimension into view.

Consider the words "fruit of the earth and work of human hands." Bread and wine are not purely natural but nature transformed by human labor. They carry, as Jean Corbon says, "the imprint of our hands."⁵ So the bread and wine brought forth represent both the gift of creation and our working relationship with the earth, in biblical

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Quoted by Goffredo Boselli in *The Spiritual Meaning of the Liturgy* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014), 99.

terms, our stewardship. It is this stewardship, this working relationship to the earth, that will become the eucharistic presence of Christ. How goes our stewardship these days? If our stewardship harms nature and the poor—is that what we wish to bring to the Lord’s table? And once these gifts become the presence of Christ, who gave his life not for a few but for all, are we not challenged to strive for a more just and responsible economic order? In *Laudato Si’* Pope Francis quotes John Paul II to highlight the link between care for creation and care for human beings: “God gave the earth to the whole human race for the sustenance of all its members, *without excluding or favoring anyone*. . . . It is not in accord with God’s plan that these gifts be used in such a way that its benefits favor only a few.”⁶

Goffredo Boselli writes profoundly of this brief rite in a chapter titled “Mystagogy of the Presentation of the Gifts.”⁷ The ritual gesture of offering God the fruit of the earth and work of human hands echoes the offering of firstfruits in Deuteronomy 26:1-11. Several things are involved at once in the symbolism of this ancient offering.

First, in harvesting, something is to be left unharvested for the Levite and the resident alien, neither of whom could own land and who therefore depended on others for food. Second, offering the firstfruits to God obviously does not fill any need in God. Rather, it keeps us in truth: we do not own creation. It is God’s gift to all, as John Paul II said above. So offering the firstfruits, Boselli writes, “relativizes possession and puts some distance between the believer and the fruit of the land and of work.”⁸ This is not an argument against private property. Rather, what we “own” is on loan from God and brings with it responsibilities to the common good and especially the most vulnerable. Finally, once the firstfruits are ritually offered they are to be shared, especially with the poor in view: “Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the LORD your God has given to you and to your house” (Deut 26:11; NRSV). So, *provisions for the poor*

⁶ *On Care for Our Common Home: Laudato Si’*, Encyclical Letter of the Holy Father Francis (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops/Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015), par. 93.

⁷ Boselli, *The Spiritual Meaning*, 79–101.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 83.

are not an occasional extra but something central to presenting the gifts of bread and wine.

Embedded in this brief rite is a series of calls to self-transcendence. Acknowledging the Creator, we also acknowledge our createdness (“Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation”). We are freed from the illusion of absolute autonomy. We are reminded that no one can simply own creation, much less hoard it: “for through your goodness we have received.” Our use of it carries responsibilities to others, especially the most vulnerable. What comes forward in the gifts is our economic relation to creation and all of humanity: “fruit of the earth and work of human hands.” All this is the ethical depth dimension of these prayers. Both Catholic and Protestant forms prepare us for the ethics and spirituality of the eucharistic prayer.

If our economic order is flawed, if it involves some sinning against the environment and the poor, should we be celebrating at all? Should we not, as Jesus says in Matthew 5:23-24, leave our gift at the altar and first be reconciled with our neighbor and creation and only then make our offering? Were we to interpret this saying literally, we would never celebrate the Eucharist! We would never obey the command, “Do this in memory of me” (Luke 22:19). We cannot wait until the world is perfect before offering our lives to God. It is like Wendell Berry’s poem, “The Mad Farmer’s Love Song”:

O when the world’s at peace
and every man is free
then will I go down unto my love.
O and I may go down
several times before that.⁹

We have to “go down unto” that gracious Love that wants to realize the reign through us, even before the world is at peace and every woman and man is free. It is just this “going down,” following the kenotic way of Jesus that enables us to bend the arc of history more and more toward justice and compassion.

What we bring in the presentation of the gifts, our lives and our work symbolized in the bread and wine, is in fact our imperfection,

⁹ Wendell Berry, “The Mad Farmer’s Love Song,” in *Collected Poems: 1957–1982* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1985), 162.

but with longing and hope in God's grace, already enacted for us in the One who bore our griefs. Bringing gifts of a flawed economic order to the table we bring not our perfection but our lack, our ache, for the kingdom to come. It is with this same lack or ache that we engage in the eucharistic prayer. "What we offer at the threshold of the anaphora," Jean Corbon wrote, "is not gifts but an incompleteness, an appeal (the epiclesis is a groaning), the anxious expectation of creation that carries the imprint of our hands but not yet the imprint of the light."¹⁰

A First Look: The Spirituality of the Eucharistic Prayer

Moving with the life of God moving within us is the notion of spirituality that has animated these pages. This *moving with* is Christic. In his humanity borne by divinity, Christ empties himself in a spiritual motion responsive to God moving within him. Doing the will of the One who sent him, freely and lovingly, he enacts God's compassion toward the whole creation, especially human beings in their brokenness. Thus, our own spirituality is identification with Christ in the sense of a *being-like* that flows from *being-in*. "Do this in memory of me." In other words, do the whole thing, the whole life journey, with our minds stayed on Jesus. Have the mind of Jesus among you (see Phil 2:5). Jesus says, "Abide in me as I abide in you" (John 15:4; NRSV).

Abiding in this sense is also *in the Spirit* or pneumatological. It is by the Spirit dwelling in our hearts that we abide in Christ. This is what Colossians means by "Christ in you, the hope of glory" and "your life is hidden with Christ in God" (1:27; 3:3; NRSV). But abiding in and imitating is not mechanical, automatic, or magical. This imitation, borne by the indwelling grace of Christ and the Spirit, is a free and conscious response. It calls on all the intelligence and imagination we can muster. To paraphrase William Spohn, we have to figure out from the sign—Christ, the sacrament of God's compassion—how we

¹⁰ Jean Corbon, *The Wellspring of Worship*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 160. Quoted by Boselli in *The Spiritual Meaning*, 99. What I have written here is only a partial summary of Boselli's remarkable analysis of the presentation rite, 79–101.

are to become a corresponding sign to the world in our own day.¹¹ This is what the opening paragraph of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) means by calling the church a sign and sacrament of Christ (1).

When there is failure to abide, it is often because consciously or unconsciously other influences are functionally more primary than the Gospel. On the web one can find images of a gun-toting Christ, advocate of the NRA, or a Christ with the face of Che Guevara. Clearly, one's political affiliation is top dog in these examples. Christ is made to serve rather than challenge human ideologies. But the Word, to which we return time and again, challenges us to identify with Christ and his teaching above all else. It is only because, as Alexander Schmemmann says, "Christ is in us and we are in Christ" that Christian persons and communities stand a chance of being the signs they are meant to be. The liturgy and, in a specific way, the eucharistic prayer draw us into the central action whereby we abide in Christ and sign him to the world: self-offering. And self-offering is but another word for self-emptying.

Psalm 116 asks: what return shall we make for God's bounty to us? "I will lift the cup of salvation," says the psalmist (v. 13), and a few lines later adds:

I am your servant; the child of your serving girl.
 You have loosed my bonds.
 I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice
 and call on the name of the LORD.
 I will pay my vows to the LORD
 in the presence of all his people,
 in the courts of the house of the LORD. (vv. 16-19; NRSV)

Viewed through Christian eyes, the servant, indeed the suffering servant, is Jesus, child of Mary. His advent as servant flows from God and servant Mary's yes ("your serving girl"). This momentous yes is the return she makes to God who "has done great things" for her (Luke 1:46-55; NRSV). The sacrifice of thanksgiving is Christ's self-offering in his life and death, a self-emptying love affirmed by God in the resurrection ("you have loosed my bonds"). This is the essential

¹¹ William Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 50–52.

content of the eucharistic prayer. This is the Christic motion of the prayer we trace through, with, and in Christ. “Do this in memory of me.” These words do not simply mean repeating the ritual but living what the ritual symbolizes and renders present: the self-emptying love of Christ. In him, we become the servant, humanly born of woman, offering the thanksgiving sacrifice ritually and existentially. This is how we make a return, how we “pay our vows” to God. But in the spirit of Psalm 116, it is a responsive gift of love courageously and gladly given.

This pattern corresponds to what we found in chapter 7, concerning the parallel between the stages of *lectio divina* and the liturgy. The third stage of *lectio divina* is *oratio*: speaking a word of self-offering back to God who has given the Word made flesh that offered himself for us. The ritual-liturgical form of this is the eucharistic prayer. We make this return in many ways across our lives, not only within, but beyond the liturgy. But in liturgical prayer we explicitly *say* our love of God who has first loved us. We explicitly “say ourselves,” to recall Yves Congar’s phrase,¹² in relation to the paschal mystery.

There is always the temptation to think of sacramental ritual as secondary to reality, something floating above our lives that is not strictly necessary. But are not our most real and self-actualized experiences those in which we give ourselves by explicitly “saying ourselves” to an *other*—a friend, a lover, a spouse, a community, a moral cause, a spiritual path? When I explicitly say my love to my beloved, this is not icing on the cake—this is the cake, even if I am not literally voicing it constantly. Karl Rahner once said that he prayed not because he believed but rather “I believe because I pray.”¹³

Citing Psalm 116 above, I initially described the spirituality of the prayer as “welcoming the gift of God and making a return.” This is shorthand, in fact, for how Louis-Marie Chauvet understands this prayer. Before looking at his approach in some detail in chapter 9, it will be helpful to explore two questions: What kind of script is it? Who enacts it? A final question—what is its structure?—will be treated in the next chapter.

¹² Yves Congar, *The Word and the Spirit* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 10.

¹³ *Encounters with Karl Rahner*, ed. and trans. Andreas Batlogg and Melvin E. Michalski (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2009), 263.

Two Questions:

What Kind of Script Is It? Who Prays It?

First, what kind of script is this? Earlier, I introduced the distinction between the word in the readings and the word in the rite. The eucharistic prayer is a case of the word in the rite. It communicates the paschal mystery in a highly abbreviated form compared to the detailed elaboration of the Scriptures. Chauvet makes a similar distinction under the heading “Word-Scripture and Word-Sacrament.”¹⁴ Borrowing a term from chemistry, he says every sacrament is a “precipitate” or crystallization of the Scriptures. This is how we must understand the eucharistic prayer, culminating in the sacrament of Holy Communion. It is rooted in the Scriptures, summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting them throughout. So, Word-Scripture, enacted first in the Liturgy of the Word, pervades, informs, and is crystallized in Word-Sacrament—the bread and wine made holy and received by the church. Meditating on the Scriptures is “tasting and seeing,” that is, chewing the cud of the word. Consuming the sacramental presence is a further stage in chewing the book, eating the scroll of the Word, as the prophets were once commanded to do.¹⁵ Every sacramental rite is thus a mediation or sacrament of *the Word*. Chauvet appeals to the Emmaus story: “From the table of the Scriptures to the table of the sacrament the dynamic is traditional and irreversible. . . . From the time of Emmaus, one sees the distinctively sacramental moment preceded by the scriptural moment.”¹⁶ The same risen One, present to the two on the road, citing and interpreting the Scriptures, becomes present and known to them in the breaking of the bread.

As we move into the eucharistic prayer we are not really leaving the Liturgy of the Word behind. Rather, we take it with us into this next stage. The famous formula of Augustine says when the Word is pronounced over the elements a sacrament comes to be.¹⁷ On the one hand, this means the ritual formula spoken over the elements, such as the words used with the water for baptism (“I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”). These words are scriptural, drawn from Matthew 28:19. But in a broader

¹⁴ Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, trans. Patrick Madigan and Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995), 220–21.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 222–23.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 220–21.

¹⁷ Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, Tractate 80.3.

sense the whole Liturgy of the Word *informs* the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Summarizing Rahner on this point, David Power writes:

The word of the sacrament embraces the proclamation of the gospel, the offer of grace that is expressed in scripture and preaching. It is this that is connected with the sacramental elements and rites. . . . The word already has a sacramental character when it is proclaimed as God's offer of grace within the church. When united with the elements and ritual actions, it constitutes these as offer and communication to those who are ritually touched.¹⁸

Rahner too, along with Chauvet, can say that every sacrament is a crystallization of the Scriptures. So, the word in the readings flows into the word in the rite. But who enacts this prayer, this word in the rite? An answer is provided by the dialogue that begins and the doxology that ends the prayer.

The Beginning: "Let Us Give Thanks"

"Marley was dead, to begin with. There is no doubt about that. He was as dead as a doornail." So begins Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*. Everything that happens to Scrooge begins from his partner's death. "In the beginning was the Word." So begins the Gospel of John, echoing the first words of Genesis. Everything that follows concerns this Word. Beginnings are important. They set a narrative in motion and often introduce its primary characters. Since I began this book with Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, consider how it begins. Speaking to the audience, the Stage Manager, a character in the story, gives the title and author, then says:

In it you will see you will see Miss C . . . ; Miss D . . . ; Miss E . . . ; and Mr. F . . . ; Mr. G . . . ; and Mr. H . . . ; and many others.¹⁹

This odd manner of beginning does not name the play's characters but the actual people who will assume these characters and make

¹⁸ David N. Power, *The Eucharistic Mystery: Revitalizing the Tradition* (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 273.

¹⁹ *Our Town*, in *Thornton Wilder: Collected Plays and Writings on the Theater* (New York: The Library of America, 2007), 149.

the play happen. Miss C, Mr. D, Miss E—these are just placeholders for whoever is actually involved in the play in this or that locality. The blanks are to be filled in with their actual names. This fits the ethos of the play well. Wilder wants everyone to experience *Our Town* as *their* town. In a local production, all the parts will be played by people they know, their neighbors and acquaintances, members of *their* town. This is just what the opening dialogue that begins the eucharistic prayer does. It says who is responsible for it, who will enact the prayer.

The Lord be with you. And with your spirit.
Lift up your hearts. We lift them up to the Lord.
Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. It is right and just.

The key line: “Let *us* give thanks to the Lord our God.” The key word: *us*. But who is this “us”? It is neither the priest alone nor the congregation alone, nor even the sum of the two together, but the underlying unity to which both belong—the church. The gathered church or local assembly prays this prayer. “It is the whole *community*,” says the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, “the Body of Christ united with its Head, that celebrates.”²⁰ Yes, it is a *presidential* prayer, with significant portions spoken by the priest alone. But this very word—*presidential*—indicates a relation, a *doing by one member* in service to a *doing by all members of the gathered church*. “One presides; all celebrate,” Chauvet writes.²¹ This is borne out by the back-and-forth motion, in which the priest and people take turns speaking or singing various parts of the prayer. And insofar as the priest speaks alone, it is always in the name of the assembly, it is the “we” of “Make holy, therefore, these gifts we pray . . . so that they may become for us . . .” and “we offer you, Lord, the Bread of Life . . . giving thanks that you have held us worthy.” As Chauvet says, the same “we” is apparent in Paul: “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?” (1 Cor 10:16).²²

²⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), par. 1140.

²¹ Louis-Marie Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, trans. Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), xxiii.

²² Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, 33.

Clearly, then, the word “assembly” is not a synonym for the congregation over against its priest. It is a synonym for the church to which both the presider and the congregation belong. This church is universal and local. Universal because in belonging to Christ, we belong to the baptized everywhere, not just other members of our local parish or congregation. In the Catholic tradition, church leadership—pope, bishops, ordained clergy—exists to serve and safeguard this unity of local churches. On the other hand, the most concrete manifestation of the church is in actual liturgical celebrations. They are by definition local. That is why the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) says it is “in and from these that the one and unique catholic church exists” (23). That statement is a stunner and goes against our usual habit of thought. So, one is first baptized, made a member of the church. The additional call to ordination, then, does not remove one from this assembly (universal and local) but gives one a new, sacramentally conferred role within it.

Presiding over the communal prayer of the church is like conducting a symphony. Both conductor and players belong to the one orchestra that makes the music. All are actively engaged, though one presides over their effort. Chauvet writes, “Not only is it erroneous to say that ‘such and such a priest celebrates’ (what the priest does is preside ‘in the name of Christ’), but it is insufficient to think that the community celebrates only by uniting itself to what the priest does. In fact, this community acts; it acts *as a body*, as a constituted body, as body of Christ, even though the roles and functions, the priest’s in the first place, are distributed within it in different ways.”²³

One of the great accomplishments of the Second Vatican Council has been the restoration of the local assembly/church as agent of the liturgy, an ecclesiology that had largely been lost during the Middle Ages. The decline of the liturgy toward an exclusively clerical act began even earlier. St. John Chrysostom provides a glimpse of its beginnings in a remark concerning the eucharistic prayer:

The eucharistic prayer is common; the priest does not give thanks alone, but the people with him, for he begins it only after having received the accord of the faithful. . . . If I say that, it is so that we learn

²³ Ibid.

that we are all a single body. Therefore, let us not rely on the priests for everything, but let us, too, care for the Church.²⁴

That Chrysostom has to emphasize this shows that change is already underway. He reminds his people that the action is *common* because it is the action of the church of which they are members along with their priest. In fact, we know that in place of this most ancient understanding, the liturgy of the medieval era devolved into an exclusively clerical action performed *on behalf of* but no longer *with* the gathered people.

In whatever way Protestant traditions understand ministerial leadership, they face a similar issue. In actual practice, is prayer/preaching leadership, whether by a single minister or shared among a number of them, a performance aimed at inspiring and edifying an audience-congregation? Or is it a matter of evoking and energizing an action that properly belongs to the whole assembly? Catholics and Protestants alike do not have to look far to see how easily the culturally dominant entertainment model insinuates itself in worship, replacing communal agency with the performer/audience model. The advantage of ritually structured worship is that as a repeatable and predictable script it more easily becomes an action of the whole gathered body. The locus of celebration is not this or that leader but the ritual that belongs to everyone. When worship rests solely in what a charismatic or not so charismatic preacher can provide, perhaps with the help of musicians, the center of gravity shifts from the whole gathered people to a few individuals and what they choose to present.

Why is all this important for the spirituality of the eucharistic prayer? In John's gospel, Jesus says the grain of wheat must fall to the ground and die in order to bear much fruit. That is the heart of the paschal mystery and the central plot of the eucharistic prayer. But there is more. This grain is not Jesus alone. This grain is you and me, every Christian, and every ecclesial community. In the same passage Jesus says, "Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there also will my servant be" (John 12:24-26). If Jesus is the grain of wheat that falls to the ground and dies—for the life of the

²⁴ Quoted by Herve-Marie Legrand in "The Presidency of the Eucharist According to the Ancient Tradition," in *Living Bread, Saving Cup*, ed. R. Kevin Seasoltz (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1982), 218.

world—then we must follow him there. The eucharistic prayer is nothing else than ritually following Jesus, going where he goes, joining him in “making a return.” So we are not only patients of Christ’s activity, but sharers in it.

The Ending: “Through Him, with Him, and in Him”

If beginnings are important, so are endings. Often mystery stories end by revealing *who done it*. In a quite different way, the ending of the eucharistic prayer also tells us *who done it*:

Through him, and with him, and in him,
O God, almighty Father,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all glory and honor is yours,
for ever and ever.

Our first task was to determine who the “us” of “Let us give thanks” is. It is the church, actualized in the local assembly, presided over by the priest and animated by additional ministries. But the doxology that ends the prayer shows us something else. It is only through, with, and in Christ that it is possible to pray this prayer. In doing so, we are not looking to Christ as a past and far-off ethical model to imitate. We are *in* the risen One: “abide in me as I abide in you” (John 15:4; NRSV). And because Jesus is the original enactor of this return-gift, giving himself out of love for the One who sent him and for humankind, the Eucharist is first of all not the action of the community but the action of Christ. It is Christ’s priestly act. It is our priestly act by participation: through, with, and in Christ, as the doxology says.

Further, we must not forget the significance of the phrase “the one who sent me” (John 8:29; Matt 10:40) as well as Paul’s saying that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to God (2 Cor 5:19). Christ’s priestly act is the gift of God, a *from-God-toward-us* action. Chauvet writes, “The operating subject of the sacraments is always God (through Christ and in the Spirit).”²⁵ But insofar as Christ is the Word

²⁵ Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, xxiv.

made flesh, the very *humanity* of God, this priestly act is also a *from-humanity-toward-God* response. Human reality, created, sustained, and graced by God, is transformed and sanctified to co-enact God's will in this world. Therefore, Chauvet completes the previous citation, saying, "thus sanctified, human daily life becomes liturgy or spiritual offering to God's glory."²⁶ In this sense, the eucharistic prayer is the most explicit sacramental expression of a Christian spirituality that is lived in the whole of our lives—moving with the life of God moving within us, mediated by Christ and the Spirit.

John Dunne describes well this participatory nature of Christian spirituality. It is a question of entering into the relation of Jesus with God. This is especially true when the local assembly enacts the eucharistic prayer. "I am entering into the very relation of Jesus with God and so he is *present* in me, 'I live, yet not I, but Christ in me.'" Dunne continues, quoting a line from the poet Rilke: "Entering into this 'I and thou' with God, I am entering into a stance of prayer and bringing 'all that is unsolved in my heart' to God in prayer."²⁷

The relation we enter into is not just doing the ritual but, through it, what the ritual renders sacramentally present. We must not forget this symbolic/sacramental character of the Eucharist. The bread, the wine, the words spoken over them from the Last Supper—these are symbols through and in which something else is rendered truly present. This something else is a presence that is also an action, Jesus and all that he undertook and endured in "making a return" to the One who sent him, culminating in his dying and rising. The supper and its symbols point to the cross and, through it, to glorification. The term "paschal mystery" names the whole reality.

This sheds further light on the words previously cited from Colossians 3:3: "your life is hidden with Christ in God" (NRSV). Our life—with all that is *unsolved* in our hearts—is with Christ whose heart was fully and unconflictedly *resolved* toward God. Commenting on the phrase "and the Word was with God" from John's Prologue, biblical scholar Francis J. Moloney writes, "The preposition *pros* means more than the static 'with.' It has the sense of motion toward the person

²⁶ *Ibid.*, xxv.

²⁷ John Dunne, *On Reading the Gospel* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 17.

or thing that follows.”²⁸ Because Jesus is the Word made flesh, this motion toward the Father—the One who sent him—pervades his humanity and all that he humanly does.²⁹ His resolution to go to Jerusalem when “the days drew near for his being taken up” is indeed toward Jerusalem. Literally, it says, “he hardened his face to go” (Luke 9:51).³⁰ But it is simultaneously resolution toward God, an act of obedience and love. This is the “once for all” character of Christ’s moving with the life of God moving within him. This is the resolution to which we bring “all that is unsolved in our hearts” in Christian spirituality.

We have experiences of such *participatory* resolution. From age to age, and often against great odds, people have brought all that was unsolved in their hearts to the Christic motion of self-offering, with faith, hope, and love. In recent years, such resolution brought Martin Luther King and many other civil rights workers across the bridge in Selma. It carried Dorothy, Ita, Maura, and Jean to martyrdom in El Salvador, along with Oscar Romero and countless others. It brought Dietrich Bonhoeffer to the scaffold in Nazi Germany. These are not always stories of physical martyrdom. Resolution animated the churches of South Africa in their ultimately successful struggle to end apartheid. It sustained Dorothy Day in her leadership of the Catholic Worker Movement. Organizations such as Heifer International are resolved to help people all over the world to escape from hunger and poverty. In recent years we have witnessed Amish and African American communities forgiving gunmen who took the lives of their children and adult members. Such resolution, understood as participation in God’s compassion, animates Fr. Gregory Boyle and his colleagues in their work with former gang members. To live Christian spirituality is to bring all that is unsolved in our hearts to the God-resolved heart of Christ. As Pope Francis prayed in his Easter

²⁸ Francis Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, Sacra Pagina Series (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 35.

²⁹ As discussed in chapter 4, this always being turned toward God in the depths of Jesus’ humanity does not preclude him from growing in his awareness of sonship and of knowing and willing in a genuinely human way. It does not assume some ongoing, direct vision of God that would sidestep his humanity.

³⁰ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, Sacra Pagina Series (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 162n51.

Vigil homily, “May we allow the beating of his heart to quicken our faintness of heart.”³¹

The Catholic Church also believes that such a spiritual movement may happen among all people of good will, whether or not they formulate it in terms of Christianity or some other religious belief. The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*) says, “since Christ died for everyone . . . we must hold that the holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery” (22). At all times, but especially when we as church pray the eucharistic prayer, we are mystically “hidden with Christ in God.” His living, dying, and rising and our participation in it is the existential reality of the prayer. And this reality, this spirituality, is reflected in the very structure of the prayer. To that structure we now turn.

³¹ Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis, Vatican Basilica, Holy Saturday, 15 April 2017.

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