

OPEN WIDE YOUR HEARTS, BEGINNING WITH THE MASS

Looking into the Future of the Catholic Eucharistic Celebration

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THE FALLING OFF in Mass attendance today, especially among young people, presents pastors—and parents—with a challenging situation, but not one without hope. This hope emerges from a variety of sources. The decline in membership of organized religions is not matched by a rise in atheism, which in the United States remains constant at about 3 per cent.¹ Young adults who no longer attend church services almost invariably retain some spirituality. That spirituality deserves our attention. We ask here: why might young people find it difficult to find Christ in the Christian community? And what manner of celebrating the Mass might be most supportive of the spirituality of young people?

While the studies quoted in this article come from the United States, its concerns apply much more broadly in our global society. The pattern can be seen as a part of the signs of the times to which the bishops were already responding at the Second Vatican Council.

The Foresight of Vatican II

In the first sentence of Vatican II's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, the bishops anticipated the issues and the anguish that would only grow sharper over time. They recalled 'the joys and the

¹ Elizabeth Drescher, 'The Gospel According to the "Nones": Reading Scripture without Religion', *America* (8–15 June 2015), available at <https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/gospel-according-nones>. The figures for the rest of the world vary widely: see Ariela Keysar and Juhem Navarro-Rivera, 'A World of Atheism: Global Demographics', in *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism*, edited by Steven Bullivant and Michael Rose (Oxford: OUP, 2013), 553–586.

hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.² Then, in 1971, the World Synod of Catholic Bishops would emphasize the importance of this theme for the future of the Church. They wrote:

Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.³

Over the years since the Council, the connection between faith and justice has drawn much attention, as a 'constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel', amid ever-widening awareness of other people's hopes and griefs in our time. Since the late 1960s many Catholic schools have involved all their students in service projects on behalf of the poor or needy. Volunteerism has grown immensely both inside and outside such schools. Jesuit schools worldwide have taken educating 'men and women for others' as central to their mission since 1973 when the Jesuit Father General Pedro Arrupe coined the phrase.⁴ Also many Catholic

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A student volunteering in a soup kitchen

² *Gaudium et spes*, n. 1.

³ World Synod of Catholic Bishops, *Justice in the World*, n. 6, available at <https://www1.villanova.edu/content/dam/villanova/mission/JusticeInTheWorld1971.pdf>.

⁴ See Pedro Arrupe, address to the Tenth International Congress of Jesuit Alumni of Europe, 31 July 1973, available at <http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/men-for-others.html>.

universities have created the post of vice-president for mission to foster attention to social justice in teaching and in outreach programmes. National and international volunteer corps now exist among Jesuit alumni as well as for retirees who would like to see life as the service of others.

We need to ask, then, how well our eucharistic celebrations each Sunday foster this expansive charity and justice for all? Do these celebrations inspire Roman Catholics to distinguish themselves because of their baptism into Christ? Is the witness of practising Catholics a force drawing others to the eucharistic celebration?

'Somes' and 'Nones'

In 2015, a series of interviews and surveys was carried out by a professor at the Jesuit Santa Clara University in California to investigate what people considered 'spiritually meaningful'.⁵ In the interviews a significant difference was observed between the responses of the *nones*, people who say they have no religious affiliation, and the views of *somes*, those who do identify themselves as religious. In general, the *nones* retained a spirituality characterized by universal charity, with their favourite bible passage often being the parable of the Good Samaritan. In this parable Jesus emphasizes that everyone is our neighbour, and he also makes another point: it was not the religious people, the priest and Levite, who passed the test. It was the Samaritan, despised by the Jews, who took compassion on the Jewish man who had been beaten by robbers and left to die.

On the other hand, many *somes*, who attend religious services, were so-called 'Golden Rule Christians', preferring a less expansive description of charity, the Golden Rule: do to others as you would have them do to you.⁶ This can be interpreted in various ways, but it is not as inclusive as the Good Samaritan parable. It can be well satisfied by a more parochial charity towards those around us. We might focus on our relatives and friends, those who are like us and those in our own country—since if the law does not protect them then it does not protect us.

The psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg divides human moral development into six stages, from an initial orientation towards punishment and

⁵ See Elizabeth Drescher, *Choosing Our Religion: The Spiritual Lives of America's Nones* (New York: Oxford UP, 2016), appendix A.

⁶ See Nancy Ammerman, 'Golden Rule Christianity: Lived Religion in the American Mainstream', in *Lived Religion in America: Towards a History of Practice*, edited by David D. Hall (Princeton: PUP, 1997), 196–216; Drescher, *Choosing Our Religion*, 182–217.

obedience to the acquisition of ‘universal ethical principles’.⁷ The narrow way of understanding the Golden Rule falls into his second stage, characterized by ‘individual instrumental purpose and exchange’: ‘at stage 2 the Golden Rule is integrated as concrete reciprocity, “return favor for favor and blow for blow”’.⁸ We need to ask how far the attitudes of practising Catholics are located in this second stage. In it social awareness extends to those ‘like us’ (in familial, ethnic, racial, class or religious terms). There is an over-reliance on authority figures, and on a somewhat mechanical observance of the law. From this perspective mere attendance at Mass is a serious obligation; but active participation is not required. Other characteristics of this stage would be self-righteousness, deal-making (with the saints, perhaps?) and seeing suffering as punishment. By contrast, when we see *everyone* as our neighbour, we are operating at the highest stage of moral awareness. Such universal charity has strong roots in Christianity.

The Calling

**Divine charity
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Jesus called on his followers to love God with all their heart, by loving as he did. And how did he love? He brought ‘good news to the poor’ (Luke 4: 18) by reaching out to the suffering and afflicted, the outcasts of his time. His whole life has been summed up in the description ‘Jesus, the Compassion of God’.⁹ And his one, distinctive new commandment to his followers was: love one another as I have loved you. Jesus described this compassionate love as the whole substance of the judgment on our lives: how we have fed the hungry, given drink to the thirsty, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, cared for the sick and visited the prisoner (Matthew 25:35–36).

From this we can conclude that divine charity is most distinguished by its universality. It embraces all God’s children, not just those near or dear to us. As Jesus said: ‘If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them.’ (Luke 6:32)

St Paul eloquently reinforces this in his description of charity as far superior to all other gifts: If I ‘do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a

⁷ See Lawrence Kohlberg, *Essays on Moral Development*, volume 1, *The Philosophy of Moral Development: Moral Stages and the Idea of Justice* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981), xxviii and throughout.

⁸ Anne Colby, Lawrence Kohlberg, John Gibbs and Marcus Lieberman, ‘A Longitudinal Study of Moral Judgment’, in *New Research in Moral Development*, edited by Bill Puka (New York: Garland, 1994), 4.

⁹ See Elizabeth Johnson and Susan Rakoczy, *Who Do You Say That I Am? Introducing Contemporary Christology* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 1997), 68.

clanging cymbal' (1 Corinthians 13: 1). Charity is all we take with us when we die. It is the determinant of our sanctity, the degree to which we reflect God to others through our glorified bodies. Calling it sanctifying grace and divine life has not helped clarify how we grow in this grace. Charity is simply unselfish love, the decision to keep doing good, not looking for any material advantage for ourselves. This charity is fostered by the Spirit that God has placed within the heart of every human person.

If I could suggest a warning, an addition to the list of snarky sayings that characterize Pope Francis, my contribution would be: the Church is not a private salvation club. We are baptized to be ambassadors of God's love for the whole world. The final cause or purpose of the Communion bread needs more emphasis in our homilising and manner of celebration: it is for our transformation into other Christs. During the eucharistic prayer at Mass the priest never prays in his own name; it is always 'we' who offer, 'we' who celebrate. And it is we who need to spend some quiet time after Communion listening to how God is calling us to speak and act so as to bring the face of Christ into our world, near and far. Pedro Arrupe wrote:

The rediscovery of what might be called the 'social dimension' of the Eucharist is of tremendous significance today. We once again see Holy Communion as the sacrament of brotherhood and unity In the Eucharist, in other words, we receive not only Christ, the head of the Body, but its members as well Wherever there is suffering in the body, wherever members of it are in want or oppressed, we, because we have received the same body and are part of it, must be directly involved. We cannot opt out or say to a brother or sister: 'I do not need you. I will not help you.'¹⁰

How far have we progressed since Vatican II in helping Catholics to see the deeper meaning of the communion bread, and the nature of Christian charity, which requires love for all peoples? Where are we now as Church, and what might be our next steps forward?

Testimony to Deficiencies

At Vatican II, Cardinal De Smedt of Bruges described the evils bedeviling the Church today as clericalism, legalism and triumphalism.¹¹ These are not likely to attract young people to our parishes. And yet where

¹⁰ Pedro Arrupe, 'The Eucharist and Hunger', in *Justice with Faith Today* (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1980), 176–177.

¹¹ See Henri de Lubac, *Vatican Council Notebooks*, volume 1, translated by Andrew Stefanelli and Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2015), 429.

are we on these, fifty years after Vatican II? In his apostolic exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis decried ‘an excessive clericalism which keeps [the laity] away from decision-making’.¹² He frequently criticizes the lavish lifestyles of some priests and religious, and deplors the cleric ‘worried more about himself, about organizations and structures, than about the true good of the People of God’.¹³ Of legalism Francis has said that too often people ‘dilute’ the life-giving power of mercy with ‘abstract formulations and legalistic conditions’.¹⁴ And of triumphalism he has stated: ‘When I hear about the Christian roots of Europe, I sometimes fear the tone, which can be triumphalist or vengeful. This then becomes colonialism.’¹⁵ He has also said:

Triumphalism in the Church impedes the Church A triumphalist, half-way Church, that is a Church that is content with what it is or has, well sorted—well organized—with all its offices, everything in order, everything perfect.¹⁶

In spite of this image of the Church, which many in the hierarchy maintain, what we get from the media is more the image of the Peter who denied Christ. That everything is not ‘in order’ is apparent from the paedophilia scandal, from the revelations about the doings of some cardinals in the Vatican, and from the growing pains the Church is experiencing, with sharp disputes between its conservative wing and its progressive wing.

Yet, the Church is not the hierarchy but the Lord’s people, and this also must be our message. We have seen that many young adults, in particular, wish to maintain a more expansive and universalising understanding of what it means to be the People of God, the Body of Christ, than what they see at present in their local Christian communities. Just as Pope Francis comes across to people as another Christ, our brother,

¹² Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 102.

¹³ Pope Francis, homily, Profession of Faith with the Bishops of the Italian Episcopal Conference, 24 May 2013, available at https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130523_omelia-professio-fidei-cei.html. And see his address to the meeting with seminarians and novices, 6 July 2013, at https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco_20130706_incontro-seminaristi.html.

¹⁴ Pope Francis, ‘Discourse of the Holy Father Francis to the Members of the 36th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus’, 4, available at http://gc36.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/20161024_Discourse_Pope_GC36_EN.pdf, accessed 26 October 2017.

¹⁵ ‘Pope Francis’, interview with Guillaume Goubert and Sébastien Maillard, *La Croix* (17 May 2016), translated by Stefan Gigacz, available at <https://www.la-croix.com/Religion/Pape/INTERVIEW-Pope-Francis-2016-05-17-1200760633>.

¹⁶ ‘Pope at Mass: The Temptation of Triumphalism’, Vatican Radio (29 May 2013), available at <http://www.news.va/en/news/pope-at-mass-the-temptation-of-triumphalism>.

so can all the clergy and parishioners exhibit the compassionate and welcoming face of Christ as he would have us do. This most centrally involves our eucharistic celebrations, and so we ask how might these be improved. In order to understand where we are and the road forward, it helps to understand how we got here—the historical background.

Historical Background

That we are one people under God, all brothers and sisters, is a basic tenet of Christian faith. This became obscured during the Counter-Reformation period and remained so right up to Vatican II. By the 1960s most Catholics considered to be abhorrent practices that once seemed justifiable: the persecution of heretics, the mistreatment of indigenous peoples under colonialism, the inferior place assigned to women in society, and the exclusion of black people from Catholic universities in the United States right up to the 1940s. The social encyclicals that began with Leo XIII in 1891 saw the Church addressing new challenges in the public forum, and addressing old issues in new ways.

The Vatican II Declaration on Religious Freedom which called for freedom of conscience was hotly debated but, in the end, received an overwhelming majority of the bishops' votes. This was a turning point in the Church's history, given what some popes had said during the Counter-Reformation period. For centuries missionaries had risked their lives simply to baptize people, based on the prevalent belief that the baptism of desire—implicit baptism expressed in a Christian life and death—was a rare thing. Most of those not baptized were considered to be condemned to an eternity in Hell.¹⁷ A God who would create most of the people in history in this frightful situation now seems more in accord with the earliest period of the Hebrew scripture than with what educated young adults today are prepared to accept.

Another stimulus to a more universal charity came from the study of Paul's epistles, which had been considered dangerous territory for Catholics since it was seen as having led other Christians to heresy since the Reformation. During my own studies for the priesthood at St Louis University Divinity School in the mid-1960s, all our professors had been educated at the Gregorian University in Rome, with one exception: for

¹⁷ See Avery Dulles, "Who Can Be Saved?" *First Things* (February 2008), available at <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2008/02/001-who-can-be-saved-8>, accessed 26 October 2017.

Paul we had to look to Presbyterian scholar Keith F. Nickle (which made the local archbishop to remove his seminarians from the Divinity School!).

Catholics still do not hear as much as they should from the greatest Christian theologian. We need to hear more sermons on Paul's teaching about the body of Christ alongside Vatican II's teaching on the subject to understand the present moment in church history. The image of the body of Christ is not purely metaphorical but rather the most real presentation of what we are called to be, sons and daughters in the Son, now and for all eternity.¹⁸ And it is difficult to escape the fact that all those who are living according to their consciences are a part of this body, which follows from God's universal salvific will.¹⁹ Those who are baptized disciples of Christ do not have a free pass, but a talent to be used to show the face of Christ to the world. In this way Christians are to bring all peoples to a conscious understanding of the source of the Spirit in their hearts, and of their calling in Christ Jesus.

Pope Francis, with his accustomed empathy for how people feel, has decried an excessive focus on private morality:

If in the course of the liturgical year a parish priest speaks about temperance ten times but only mentions charity or justice two or three times, an imbalance results, and precisely those virtues which ought to be most present in preaching and catechesis are overlooked.²⁰

Francis also exemplifies the teaching of Ignatius of Loyola in the *Spiritual Exercises*, that we should find God in all things (Exx 230–237). He is very ecumenical in his outreach and also very non-judgmental, seeing hope for salvation in even the most challenging situations. As Paul taught, 'Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more' (Romans 5:20). How then can the Eucharist be celebrated to inspire greater commitment to bring God's love to the world?

Challenges for our Eucharistic Celebration

In brief, *ressourcement*, recapturing the spirit of the early church Eucharist, was behind the liturgical changes of Vatican II.²¹ What early Christians celebrated in memory of Jesus was to be restored to its 'noble simplicity'

¹⁸ *Lumen gentium*, 1. 7.

¹⁹ *Lumen gentium*, 1. 16.

²⁰ *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 38.

²¹ Keith Pecklers, 'The History of the Modern Liturgical Movement', at <http://religion.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-19> (paywall).

and forcefulness, free of distracting accretions.²² It has been said that it has often taken a century to implement a church council, and that we are still only half way to implementing the liturgical renewal envisaged by many of the theologians at the council. Hans Urs von Balthasar has said:

We must make every effort to arouse the sense of community within the liturgy ... enlarging the scope of prayer, so often narrow and selfish, to embrace the concerns of the whole Church and, indeed—as in the Our Father—of God [This is] one of the conditions for the presence of the Eucharistic Lord: ‘Where two or three are gathered together ...’—that is, where individuals, in profound faith and obedience, desire to be and to realise the Church—‘there I am in the midst of you’.²³

Vatican II called for full, active, conscious participation from the congregation. What suggestions have been made to foster this participation?

The cardinal in charge of the Congregation for the Divine Worship in 2016 advocated a return to Masses celebrated with the priest’s back to the people, in the name of ‘a more authentic implementation of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*’.²⁴ This seems to me to be the wrong direction in which to go. A vibrant sharing among the congregation is facilitated by the priest facing the people and inviting them to take the active part to which they are called as one priestly people. There are also other ways in which a careful choice of options can facilitate participation. The *esprit de corps* experienced at youth congresses and pilgrimages and at Christmas



²² *Sacrosanctum concilium*, n. 34.

²³ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Church and World* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), 32.

²⁴ ‘Full Text: Cardinal Sarah at Sacra Liturgia Conference’, *Catholic Herald* (12 July 2016), available at <http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2016/07/12/full-text-cardinal-sarah-at-sacra-liturgia-conference/>.

Masses, when people are close together and singing with spirit, can be an experience that draws youth to weekly celebrations. This spirit must be our focus as we plan the liturgy, with the choir fully collaborating towards this goal. We can listen to beautiful sacred music at home, and God's redeeming love for us is constant, with or without our celebration. But sacraments appeal to our social nature, when we feel oneness with a community that, in baptism, promised to share its faith, and can fulfil this promise, either more or less, at the weekly Eucharist.

Parts of the Mass

The Meaning of the Communion

At the beginning of the Mass, although turning in on ourselves and confessing our sinfulness is offered as an option, in the *New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship* Daniel Grigassy writes:

The penitential rite has been experienced in its various forms as a disturbance in the ritual flow of the liturgy, an afterthought between the greeting and gathering prayer. Many pastors and liturgists note this misplacement of the penitential rite. If the purpose of the introductory rites is to make the assembled people a unified community and to prepare them properly to listen to God's word and to celebrate the eucharist ... why run the risk of individualizing members of the assembly in a penitential mode after they have gathered precisely as a worshipping community?²⁵

The same might be said of the *Lamb of God*, which can convey the idea that we make ourselves worthy by protestations of our sinfulness. We should rather see our imperfections as always remaining with us, with the love or true charity signified by the communion bread as the only remedy.

The *Lamb of God* accompanies the breaking of the communion bread and is repeated only 'as many times as necessary until the rite has reached its conclusion' (*GIRM*, 83). Often the priest has completed breaking the bread by the time the congregation has concluded the gesture of peace, and a spoken rather than sung *Lamb of God* is more than sufficient. Also, the priest is ordinarily not to go to the tabernacle for hosts: 'It is most desirable that the faithful ... receive the Lord's Body from hosts consecrated at the same Mass' (*GIRM*, 85). By focusing on the bread consecrated at this Eucharist,

²⁵ Daniel Grigassy, 'Penitential Rite at Mass', in *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, edited by Peter E. Fink (Collegeville: Michael Glazier), 944–945, quoting *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (Washington DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011; hereafter *GIRM*), 47.

the message can be driven home that it is our own consecration, our own transformation into the body of Christ on earth that the bread signifies.

Music and Community

The ritual also recommends that the communicants ‘by means of the unity of their voices ... highlight more clearly the “communitarian” nature of the procession to receive Communion’ (GIRM, 86). This leads to the question of how to enhance congregational singing. The chief task of the choir is to facilitate this congregational singing, not to introduce variety or enhance a narrowly defined theme for the particular Mass. As *Sacrosanctum concilium* affirms:

... fully conscious, and active participation ... is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy, ... the aim to be considered before all else; for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit.²⁶

Fostering this spirit needs to become our top priority if the Mass is to become again a serious force, cherished in the Christian life. For this it helps for the hymns to be well memorised, as is evident if the hymn is to be sung during the communion procession. And the singing is *at least* marginally better when people know the song by heart. It also makes for better liturgy when the people are not reading from books but listening to the proclamation of the Word and conscious of others close around them with whom they are united in song, not scared by the sound of their own voices.

To achieve this fulsome participation the ritual allows for the people’s use of *seasonal* responses to the responsorial psalm between the readings. Also, as the congregation come to understand what it means for Christ’s presence to be realised ‘where two or three are gathered in my name’ (Matthew 18: 20), they may be persuaded to sit together, at the front, close to the table of the Lord, the better to signify a community come to share their faith. Tabernacles can be removed from behind the table of the Lord, and the focus placed on Christ’s presence in Word and in community celebration. Placing fewer statues front and centre removes the atmosphere of a shrine and reminds us that we, the people, constitute Church.

²⁶ *Sacrosanctum concilium*, n.14. And see n.114: ‘Choirs must be diligently promoted, especially in cathedral churches; but bishops and other pastors of souls must be at pains to ensure that, whenever the sacred action is to be celebrated with song, the whole body of the faithful may be able to contribute that active participation which is rightly theirs’.

Early Christians huddled together to support one another in a hostile Roman empire. In our increasingly agnostic world, leery of superstition and credulity, we better realise the power of our faith if, as a believing community, we ‘lift up our hearts’ together in sincere *gratitude to God*, and so do not fall prey to indifference to the sufferings of our neighbours, near and far. This gratitude leading to a lived response of service is the fruit of a well-celebrated Eucharist. Even the quiet time after Communion, when priest and people together listen to the Lord in their hearts, can remain a meaningful experience of being one body in the Lord.

The Dismissal

Pope Benedict called for amplification of the dismissal at Mass, to remind us that we are all disciples, sent forth to preach the good news of God’s love by our lives.²⁷ While there are places in the Mass where the priest is encouraged to personalise a transition, some would like to see this extended to the dismissal, where proposals have included one or other like the following, taken largely from 1 Thessalonians 5:

Go forth in peace, have courage, hold on to what is good, return no one evil for evil. Strengthen the fainthearted, support the weak, help the suffering, respect all persons. Love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of God’s Spirit in you, and give thanks to God in all circumstances.²⁸

If this is truly the spirit of our celebration together, then we will be further encouraged to present the face of Christ to the world as Pope Francis has done, and his popularity will become the Church’s popularity.

Sacrifice: A Sticking Point

The Catholic Church has been changing and developing its understanding of sacrifice from at least the 1960s.²⁹ While the word ‘propitiate’ was restored in the 2007 GIRM in English, after being removed in 1971, in the

²⁷ Benedict XVI, *Sacrosanctum caritatis*, n.51. And see also Brian MacMichael, ‘The New Translation of the Holy Mass: The Concluding Rites’, *Today’s Catholic* (2 March 2011), available at <http://www.todaycatholicnews.org/2011/03/the-new-translation-of-the-holy-mass-13/>, accessed 27 October 2017.

²⁸ This form is used in the Church of England; see ‘Blessings’, in *Common Worship* (London: Church House, 2006), 299, available at <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-worship/worship/texts/principal-services/holy-communion/furtherblessings.aspx>.

²⁹ See *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, edited by Raymond E. Brown (Pearson, 1989), 82: 73; 76: 89–95. Also see Robert J. Daly, ‘Sacrifice: The Way to Enter the Paschal Mystery’, *America* (12 May 2003), available at <https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/433/article/sacrifice-way-enter-paschal-mystery>.

understanding of most theologians ‘expiation’ better expresses the purpose of Jesus’ self-offering in obedience to the Father. The primary effect of this sacrifice is to give us confidence and encouragement. The theme of confidence occurs thirteen times in the Epistle to the Hebrews, which explains how Jesus replaces superabundantly the earlier ideas of sacrifice.³⁰ Sacrifice in the New Testament is spiritualised: obedience to the Father’s will, and also lips that praise God’s name (Hebrews 5:8–9; 13:15). As Edward Kilmartin of the Gregorian University in Rome explains:

Sacrifice is not, in the first place, an activity of human beings directed to God and, in the second place, something that reaches its goal in the response of divine acceptance and bestowal of divine blessing on the cultic community. Rather, sacrifice in the New Testament understanding—and thus in its Christian understanding—is, in the first place, the self-offering of the Father in the gift of His Son, and in the second place the unique response of the Son in his humanity to the Father, and in the third place, the self-offering of believers in union with Christ by which they share in his covenant relationship with the Father.³¹

As long as we focus on what the priest is doing for us, we can remain passive, in mere attendance, and believe we are achieving the fruit of the



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³⁰ See John Zupez, ‘Salvation in the Epistle to the Hebrews’, *The Bible Today* (October 1968), 2590–2595.

³¹ Edward J. Kilmartin, *The Eucharist in the West, History and Theology* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1999), 381–382.

Mass. But when we accept that the effect of the Mass is proportionate to our own disposition and depends vitally on our active participation, we see liturgy in a new light. We recognise that, as social beings, we can profit from others' faith-filled participation in the Mass, and that we owe them our full and active participation. There is an anomaly in the situation, easily perceived by the young, when we sit apart in our own space and come close to 'strangers' only for the brief moment of the 'gesture of peace'. Joining together with strangers in the same pew can embolden us to be more Christlike to others outside church. Homilies, the liturgical committee, and the priest's column in the parish bulletin can assist in generating a renewed spirit at Mass.

A Merciful and Loving God

I can remember in the 1940s our revered pastor saying that one must attend Sunday Mass in one's own parish; to choose freely to go elsewhere failed to fulfil this serious obligation. In those days such warnings had their impact, even amid doubts, since there was little questioning of the eternity of hell fire. Today, many find it difficult to believe in a God who prepares an eternity of punishment for human beings—of finite intelligence—or for those who have no effective access to the gospel.

It is not church dogma that anyone is in hell. Also, the 1993 Catechism seems to allow room for new understanding.³² In n.1033 it states: 'This state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed is called "hell"'. Then, in n.1035, its use of quotation marks can imply the metaphorical nature of the description, and the words that follow are certainly open to interpretation: '... they suffer the punishments of hell, "eternal fire". The chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God.' Theologians have proposed alternative understandings of hell, including denying the natural immortality of the soul, which was originally a Greek rather than a Hebrew notion.³³ God gives life, and continuation in being is constant creation. It is through a life of active charity that we grow in the hope that we will share in Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

In these times of transition, many bishops (unlike my priest back in the 1940s) advise people to find a celebrational community to which

³² *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1993).

³³ See Robert Wild, *A Catholic Reading Guide to Conditional Immortality: The Third Alternative to Hell and Universalism* (Eugene: Resource, 2016).

they can relate, whether they worship in the more Tridentine style or so that close togetherness is experienced throughout the Mass and not just a gesture at the sign of peace. There is hope that people will find deeper meaning and support in a more renewed and participatory eucharistic celebration.

The Mass has always been the school of catechesis for our brethren in the Eastern and Orthodox Churches. Its Sunday celebration will continue to speak eloquently about our faith, surpassing even what can be achieved in religious education class. A principle stated in the 'Directory for Masses with Children' is that at adult Masses with children present 'it is necessary to take great care that the children present do not feel neglected'.³⁴ Just as important is the experience of the Mass that young people have as they grow up. Does the beauty, the clarity of truth in the Mass, warm our hearts each week with fresh realisation of the community of which we are a part, so that the gospel in its integrity becomes more and more a force in our lives?

I have tried to predict what our eucharistic celebration will look like in the future. I have assumed that solid historical and biblical studies will have a continuing influence on the Catholic Mass, even as they did at Vatican II. The Church will come to judge the effectiveness of the eucharistic celebration by the help it brings to future generations of Christians who wish to experience a genuine sense of community as they strive to present the face of Christ to the world.

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³⁴ 'Directory for Masses with Children', n. 17, in *The Liturgy Documents: A Parish Resource* (Chicago: Liturgy Training, 2004), volume 1, 294.