

The Word of God, Jesus Christ, and the Eucharist:

Hope in a Secularized World

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In 1996 the American Sociologist, Rodney Stark, published a provocative sociological study, called *The Rise of Christianity*.¹ He wrote this book because his reading of the work of the historians of early Christianity showed that their history was good, but their sociology was non-existent. He minimalized many theories about the rise of Christianity. Theologians and the Church historians regularly point to the transforming effect of the purity of the doctrine, the teaching of the resurrection, the blood of the martyrs, a sacramental life, and other such central Christian beliefs and phenomena. Stark questions this, insisting that the fundamental motivation for the phenomenon was that the Christians cared for one another, especially their women.

By “caring” he means that they refused the widely-practiced infanticide by exposing unwanted children, especially unwanted infant girls; they looked after the elderly and the fragile; they rejected abortion, so crude in those days that it generally led to the death of the mother. They attended to the basic needs of others in a way that was unheard of in the Roman Empire. As Stark puts it: “What Christians did was take care of one another. Their apartments were as smoky as the pagan apartments, since neither had chimneys, and they were cold and wet and they stank. But Christians loved one another and when they got sick

¹ Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

they took care of one another. Someone brought you soup. You can do an enormous amount to relieve those miseries if you look after each other.”²

What Stark suggested was that early Christianity was an alternative voice in the society of the time. Its care for the needy generated energy and attracted the interest of Roman society, led by its appeal to the pagan women and through them won the hearts of families and eventually society as a whole. This is a helpful starting reflection for a Christian Church’s mission to bring hope to a secularized world. As an Australian, addressing this situation in the Philippines, I find myself in a conflicted mindset. Without doubt, I am try to live my Christian life in the most comfortable, self-sufficient, and secular society in the world. We have no determining Christian past, as do the Americas, including the United States. We were founded by two shiploads of criminals, accompanied by a cohort of soldiers. Yet I am speaking within a cultural situation that is universally recognized as one of the most Catholic, and thus Christian, in the world. In this tension, I will take my own background and formation as my starting point, aware that the “secular” issues facing the people of the Philippines is very different to mine. But secular challenges there are, generated by such issues as religious fundamentalism with little doctrinal substance that is easily brushed aside, and the never-ending problem of Filipinos as a forced emigrant people, the struggle with corruption at every level of governance, with all its subsequent challenges. One only has to spend some time in the Salesian Parish in Tondo do have some taste of the impact a secular world is having upon this nation. What I hope to suggest, however, is that a return to a theme dear to Pope Francis might prophetically address, although not solve, *both* situations.

All of us, gathered here to celebrate the mystery of the Eucharist must recognize that we are called to be bearers of an alternative voice within contemporary society. The Eucharist

² “A Double Take on Early Christianity. An Interview with Rodney Stark.” Stark was originally interviewed by Michael Aquilina for *Our Sunday Visitor*. The text of the interview, posted July 22, 2004, can be found on <http://www.jknirp.com/stark.htm>, 1-6. The above citation can be found on p. 2. Accessed on August 10, 2014.

is a counter-cultural practice, the celebration of the life and death of Jesus Christ, who loved the world so much (see John 3:16). For better or for worse, we acknowledge that we live in a world that has changed very rapidly in two generations. The bulk of any population, no matter what their belief, and also those without a religious bent, were once able to claim adhesion to an external form of life marked by regularity and time-tested practices and a life-style underpinned by great truths. It was taken for granted we lived good lives by means of the time-honored, regular and consistent practice of a good life. This is much less the case today, and especially so in contemporary youth culture. We live in an increasingly fragmented world in which the value of regularity, time-tested practices, ways of life, and adhesion to time honored truths is often not recognized. As Phyllis Tickle reports in her important recent book, *God-Talk in America*: “When my contemporaries and I closed the doors of our mothers’ houses behind us, we locked ourselves out of five hundred years of human habits and entered into disjuncture.”³

We look at the world with increasing uncertainty. Not only the young, but also their parents and more and more of their grandparents, cherish a deep distrust of “great truths.” They look upon them as we would consider hair growth medications for balding men: if one medication had proved effective, then all the others would have disappeared from the market place. Rather than surrender themselves to one meaningful tradition, life-style or fashion, they combine fragments of an ever incomplete and temporary fashion into an unfinished whole – a collage identity. Perhaps the most outstanding symbol of this “collage” is the widespread use of Christian symbols, especially the cross, and the rosary-beads, but also others, in fashions and body-marking. In the Philippines this “collage” expresses itself in a number of forms of so-called “popular religion,” not all of which respect the great Christian tradition, and some of which have ancient pagan roots.

³ Phyllis A. Tickle, *God-Talk in America* (New York: Crossroads, 1997), 25.

There is an understandable tendency for some of us from my generation to look back to our past, see how we responded to these and similar symptoms, and to insist that we go on repeating the same processes. That is the path to certain failure. There is so much that is very good in society that is not simply a continuation of the “good things” of our past. It cannot be, as we are living an experience of disjuncture. If there is no longer a prevailing sense of religion or adherence to core beliefs and practices among at least the immediate past three generations (Generation X, Y, Z, and beyond), what lies at the heart of this potentially creative “disjuncture”?

My contemporaries were *instructed* in the great truths and the moral principles that determined our lives. We have done our best – no doubt with some failure - to live the rest of their lives following these *principles*. That was a *head-process*. Nowadays, we move in the opposite direction. Many young people today, and indeed a generation or two ahead of them, perhaps a high percentage of those present, journey through life in search of a number of different, and sometimes contrasting, *experiences* that might eventually establish the principles that will mark the future. In the past we moved from *head* to *heart*. Nowadays, and in the recent past, we tend to move from *heart* to *head*. This can be exciting and challenging, but it has a down side: slaughter on the roads, promiscuous sexual activity, starting at a very young age, recreational drugs widely available and used, many who finish locked into a death-dealing involvement with serious drugs, widespread family breakups and dysfunctional young people, racism, physical violence in the streets. But it need not be like this, and much of it is not like this. It is here that Pope Francis message to the whole Church, and indeed to the world, rings true. Somehow believers must generate a culture in which people, and especially young people, arrive at life-determining decisions through experiences that begin with *the heart*, eventually to arrive at *the head*.

Here we can go back to Rodney Stark, and take his guidance on what made the earliest Christian such an effective presence in a pagan world. Can we generate an *alternative Christian and Catholic experience* that does not start in the head and eventually go to the heart, as my generation did, but that begins with the heart, and only through an *experience* of what it means to live, love and serve arrives at the head. You are all aware of the contemporary search for goodness, justice and well-being among so many good people, not all of whom are Christian. In the face of a loss of hope or desire to respond to the Gospel in a Christian tradition, unconditional gift of self for the good of others, in the way of the Good Shepherd, must be recaptured. Our hope will be found in an “education of the heart.”

In order to do this, however, we do not have to “reinvent the wheel.” The means to this education of the heart is found in our Great Tradition: hearing and responding to the Word of God in the Scriptures, a deeper understanding and love for the person of Jesus Christ, and the practice of a Eucharistic lifestyle, which means more than “going to Mass.”

My concern will thus be threefold:

1. A reflection upon the centrality of the Word of God. Have we responded to the consistent insistence of the Church, from Leo XIII’s *Providentissimus Deus* to Pius XII *Divino Afflante Spiritu* to the Synod of Bishops on the Word of God in the life of the Church of 2008, followed by Benedict XVI’s post-Synodal Exhortation *Verbum Domini*?
2. From the beginnings we have been called “Christians” (see Acts 11:26) because we confess that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Son of God and that he saved us (John 9:22; 12:42; 20:30-31). How central is our focus upon what God has done for us in and through Jesus, and his command that we “follow” him (see Mark 1:16-20; John 21:15-20). Is our spirituality based upon the God revealed to

us by Jesus Christ in the Scriptures? Does that Spirituality make any impact upon the way we respond to our surrounding secularized world.

3. This leads us necessarily, especially in this context, to a reflection upon Eucharist and Reconciliation based upon the Word of God, the “place” where we have most intimate contact with our crucified and risen Lord.

I will close these thoughts with a reflection upon the Walk to Emmaus, a stunning Gospel narrative that encapsulates all three concerns.

The Centrality of the Word of God

In the earliest Church the authors of the New Testament books looked back to the Old Testament as their “Scripture,” as they began to articulate what the God of Israel had done for humankind through the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus.⁴ In the time of the so-called Apostolic Fathers, Christian authors continued to use the Old Testament as its “Scripture,” and steadily began to recognize many early Christian writings as authoritative. The Apostolic Fathers of the second century strained to articulate the message of the Bible, and especially the message of Jesus Christ, in a new world that had little or no understanding of the Jewish matrix that had given birth to Jesus, and the subsequent early reflection upon what God had done in and through him.

The subsequent great Fathers of the Church constantly used the Scriptures to develop and understand the Christian mysteries, and the life and practice of the Church. There was *no single interpretation* of the Bible in these periods. Different methods of interpretation were used in the West and in the East, and in the East between Antioch and Alexandria. The great Councils that determined the Christian community’s teaching and practice (Nicea [325],

⁴ For a more detailed study of the issues raised in this section of the present reflection, see Francis J. Moloney, *Reading the New Testament in the Church. A Primer for Pastors, Religious Educators, and Believers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 1-21.

Constantinople I [381], Ephesus [431], Chalcedon [451], Constantinople II [553]) are awash with reflections upon the Word of God. The richness of this founding heritage is found in the writings of such figures in the West as Tertullian (c. 160 – c. 225), St Ambrose (340-397), St Jerome (347-420), St Augustine (354-430), Leo the Great (c. 391-461), and St Gregory the Great (540-604), and in the East, Origen (184-254), St Athanasius (c. 296-373), St John Chrysostom (347-407), St Basil (329-379), and St Gregory of Nyssa (335-395), only to mention a few of the giants from that era.

Many of these biblically inspired traditions were forced into the background in the eleventh century, as Papal authority struggled with the secular princes. A more juridical, and less biblical, theological and sacramental self-understanding of Christianity began to develop. The development of a more juridically structured Church goes back to the much-needed reforms of Pope Gregory VII (1073-1085). The authority of the Pope over the secular Princes was dramatically acted out in the submission of Henry VII (Holy Roman Emperor) to Gregory VII at Canossa in 1077. Anyone who has read or watched Ken Follett's renditions on this period in *Pillars of the Earth* and *World Without End*, will have caught why this reform was necessary. However, a more juridical and hierarchical Catholicism emerged accompanied by an insistence on what was right and wrong, and disciplinary processes that kept the people subservient to ecclesiastical hierarchy. Great achievements continued in the medieval period with scholars, saints and artists. Its richness can be *read* in representatives like Thomas Aquinas, *heard* in the splendor of the musical rendition of biblical texts in Gregorian chant, and *seen* in the glass windows of the great medieval Churches of Europe.⁵

The Council of Trent (1545-1563) was called to guide the Roman tradition in its response to the Protestant Reform. There were many Catholic doctrines and practices that

⁵ Interestingly, it was precisely this aspect of twelfth century Catholicism that led Ken Follett, who had been raised in a puritan background, to write his two novels that focus upon the emergence of gothic architecture and the context of the rich liturgical settings of Medieval England.

could not be found in the Bible. The Reformers rejected such beliefs and practices as the institution of the Priesthood, many Marian teachings, the seven Sacraments, the Papacy, and the real presence of the crucified and risen Jesus in the celebration of the Eucharist. These doctrines were not found in the Word of God of the Old and New Testaments. The Council responded by teaching that there were two sources of Revelation: Tradition and Scripture. It was true that many doctrines and practices of the Catholic Church could not be found in the Bible, but they could be found in the Tradition. If a belief or a practice of the Catholic Church could not be found in the Bible, only one of the sources of Revelation, the authentic Tradition of the Church could be called upon as the other source of Revelation. The dominant opinion was that the Revelation found in the Catholic Tradition was superior to the Revelation found in the Bible. This assessment of Tradition and Scripture was repeated in 1870, in the Constitution *Dei Filius* at Vatican I.⁶

Familiarity with the Word of God as it is found in the Bible waned. Subsequently, passing “traditions,” generated by a given time and place, are dearer to Catholics than the Word of God. The acceptance and observance of these “traditions” can become the touchstone of Catholic orthodoxy, but a faith-filled reading of the Bible is uncommon. Vatican II, in its all-determining agenda of returning to the sources of the faith (using the French word *ressourcement*), asked all Catholics to rediscover the original “sources” of their faith and practice.⁷ This necessarily summons the whole Church to return to the Scriptures. This renewal began in an Encyclical of Leo XIII in 1893: *Providentissimus Deus*, and a further biblical Encyclical from Pius XII, *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, written in 1943 to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of *Providentissimus Deus*. Both documents come from troubled

⁶ For a balanced assessment of the history and importance of the Council of Trent, see John W. O’Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

⁷ On this, see John W. O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 40-43, 300-302.

times. The first, written in a period of rationalist rejection of the Bible as the Word of God, insisted on its role in the life and ministry of the Church. Pius XII's Encyclical is a watershed in the history of Catholic biblical interpretation. The Holy Father insisted that Catholics must enter the world arena of critical scholarship, to provide greater nourishment to the life and practice of the Church. Catholic scholars are now among the best in the world, precisely because of their *catholicity*: we listen to, and speak to *everyone*.

The teaching of Vatican II made a unique contribution to the history of Catholic Theology. Breaking the stranglehold of those who argued for *two sources*, *Dei Verbum* 9 teaches: "Sacred tradition and sacred scripture, then, are bound closely together, and communicate one with the other. Flowing from the same divine well-spring, both of them merge, in a sense, and move towards the same goal." The theological and spiritual consequences of this development in Catholic doctrine from a *two source* to a *unified source* understanding of Revelation are manifold. There is a further intervention from *Dei Verbum* that is not "new," but for Catholics, it is "novel." The section of the document dealing with Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church (paras 21-24), opens and closes by affirming:

The church has always venerated the divine scriptures as it has venerated the body of the Lord, in that it never ceases, above all in the sacred liturgy, to partake of the bread of life and to offer it to the faithful from the one table of the Word of God and the Body of Christ (*Dei Verbum* 21)

Just as from constant attendance at the Eucharistic mystery the life of the church draws increase, so a new impulse of spiritual life may be expected from increased veneration of the Word of God which "stands forever" (Is 40:8; see 1 Pet 1:23-25) (*Dei Verbum* 24).

While the unification of Scripture and tradition, flowing from the same divine well-spring is new, the teaching on the one table of the Word of God and the Body of Christ is ancient ... but forgotten.

In an attempt to bring the Church back to the Word of God, Benedict XVI called a Synod of Bishops on the Word of God in the Life of the Church in 2008. Like most such attempts – from Councils, Popes and Major Superiors – he had little success. Bishops and Religious Superiors have more important things to do than lead us through an intense biblical renewal. In the very first paragraph of his post-Synodal exhortation, *Verbum Domini* (2009), almost 50 years after the proclamation of *Dei Verbum*, Benedict XVI had to point out “fundamental approaches to a rediscovery of God’s Word in the life of the Church as a wellspring of constant renewal.” During the course of his exhortation, the Holy Father was thus moved to look back to striking words from St Jerome (347-420): “When we approach the Mystery, if a crumb falls to the ground we are troubled. Yet when we are listening to the Word of God, and God’s word and Christ’s flesh are being poured into our ears we pay no heed.”⁸

A Spirituality Based upon the God revealed to us by Jesus Christ

Starting with the heart, we should recognize that what is deepest within us is formative of us. It makes or breaks us as human beings, yet it is somehow beyond our control. To use philosophical language, it “transcends” us. It is bigger than us, and yet so real: it overwhelms us, yet determines us. This covers the whole gamut of possible human experiences, from the good to the bad, from extraordinary and unconditional love to the frustration that results from unresolved anger and jealousy, and the list could go on. These all-determining and formative elements within the human spirit can be read as experienced signs of the divine within us. On

⁸ Benedict XVI, *Post-Synodal Exhortation Verbum Domini* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2009), paragraph 56, citing Jerome’s *Commentary on the Psalms*, 147 (Corpus Christianorum Latinorum 78, 337-338).

the basis of these experiences of the heart, we sense that we are radically open to, and determined by, the transcendent. *This is the key to a Christ-centered spirituality.* Once we begin to see things this way ... we are opening the doors to the possibility that all human beings share in the divine. We are touching the so-called theme of “deification,” so important to earliest Christian tradition, but lost in the steady juridical shaping of the Tradition since the late Middle Ages. A Christian spirituality is built upon an acceptance of the God revealed to us by Jesus Christ. But here our lack of a biblical culture becomes a problem. When asked about the Word of God, we have no self-confidence: it is all too hard. A personal relationship with Jesus and a life-style directed by Gospel values are obviously intimately related, but without any real familiarity with the Gospels we turn to religious authorities, or popular culture.

We are all irrevocably marked by the divine; we yearn for the divine home, for which we were created. The words of St Augustine continue to ring true: “You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you” (*Confessions* I, 1). It is in our humanity that we are in touch with our divine, because in Jesus of Nazareth humanity has been lived as it should be lived. This is something many of us cannot accept: that Jesus was unconditionally human, like us in all things but sin (see Heb 4:15). We nod acceptance to the *doctrinal* truth that Jesus was both human and divine, but we do not identify with his humanity. It was as a human being that Jesus loved, hoped, sang, danced, prayed, interacted with other human beings in creative ways, and suffered. We share all that with Jesus: love, hope, song, dance, prayer, interaction with others, and suffering. We sin when we do not respond properly to the presence of that which is most sublime in our humanity, and we begin to act selfishly, arrogantly, jealously, proudly, satisfying the hungers of our basic urges. These responses are not “human.” They are less than human, and played no role in the life of Jesus. To sin means to reject the experience of the divine within us that yearns for fulfilment.

A relationship with Jesus means is sharing in the blend of the human and the divine that is both his and ours. We are to live and love as he lived and loved. As the author of the First Letter of John puts it: “Whoever says ‘I abide in him’ ought to walk just as he walked” (1 John 2:6). But that Jesus never rejected the experience of the divine that yearns for fulfilment. As the Letter to the Hebrews says: “We have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who *in every respect* has been tempted as we are, *yet without sin*” (Heb 4:15). Many of us learnt that we needed to accept that the union of the divine and the human in Jesus as a “mystery of faith.” The closest we could get to explaining it was to suggest that, in Jesus, the divine sphere invaded the human. This widely held and preached view depended on what could be described as God’s “downward movement” from heaven to the earth, to become incarnate among us as Jesus Christ. But is that the only way to articulate this mystery of our faith? The Word of God has another point of view.

There are three essential elements that lie at the heart of an understanding of the Gospel portrait of Jesus.⁹ He related to God as his Father. During his life there was a oneness of purpose between Jesus and God so profound that he was able to cry out “*Abba*, father” in his prayer (see Mark 14:36). This oneness led to Jesus’ unswerving commitment to preaching, especially via his unforgettable parables, to establishing and living the living presence of God as king (the Kingdom of God). Israel had spoken of God as “father,” but not as a father who sets his children free, and who seeks them out in the failure, finding them in the darkness, telling them “all that I have is yours” (Luke 15). Jesus not only *told* parables about such a father, but he lived as the Father asked, praying from the Cross that they be

⁹ For a more detailed analysis of the Gospels that produces the “portrait” of Jesus sketched in the following paragraphs, see Moloney, *Reading the New Testament in the Church*, 64-90.

forgiven (23:34), as they did not know what they were doing, and welcomed the repentant criminal into paradise (23:43).

But this unswerving openness to God, his bold proclamation of God's way and the establishment of the Kingdom led to his rejection, suffering and death. He could see the clouds darkening on the horizon, but he did not sidestep suffering and death. He used an expression taken from the Book of Daniel (Dan 7:13-14), "the Son of Man," that indicated to all who heard him that he followed down this conflicted way in the conviction that God would have the last word. Suffering and death were accepted by Jesus, not without fear, as he took on the role of the suffering Son of Man, confident that good would come from it. The resurrection, then, is God's "yes" to Jesus' lifelong "yes" to God, whom he called his Father.

On the basis of these Gospel values: obedience, the inbreak of the kingdom, and preparedness to lay down his life that others may have life, we can suggest that we need to rethink the pattern of the "downward" movement of the divine into the human. The Gospels instruct us that in the event of Jesus of Nazareth the divine did not break into the human, but in Jesus, humankind realized its full potential. In Jesus of Nazareth there is an "upward" exaltation of the human condition: the human breaks into the divine. The Gospels lead us to suggest that in Jesus the full potential of humanity has been totally realized. In and through Jesus of Nazareth, *the human invaded the divine*. Our humanity is something which Jesus shared with us, and where we too can experience the presence of the divine in us.

Jesus brought in the reigning presence of God. As Son, he responded unconditionally to God, costing the Son of Man no less than everything. But he did not do this simply because he was a good human being who realized his potential. While there is truth in claiming: "One of us made it!" ... it is not the whole truth. Jesus realized the fullness of the divine

possibilities of all human beings *because he was Son*. It is his being the Son of God that engenders his response to God. Does this mean that we can never hope to do the same? We are all capable of repeating the life-style of Jesus and, in our own time, realizing our “divineness” in its fullness. However, we do this, not because we *are* sons and daughters, but because we are *made* sons and daughters by means of our Baptism. We have been *graced* with discipleship. To say it in somewhat technical language: Jesus was son of God *by nature*; we are sons and daughters of God *by grace*. This was what Paul was trying to convey to the Galatians and the Romans when he told them how blessed they were to be able to cry out, in the Spirit, *Abba* Father! (Gal 4:4-7; Rom 8:14-15). We are potentially “another Christ,” but, for a variety of reasons, we sometimes betray our true selves and fall short of our potential deification. But the process of deification is there for us, if we recognize our dignity. Already in the second century Irenaeus wrote: “He revealed God to us and raised us to God” (*Adversus Haereses* IV, 20,5-7).¹⁰

All that is noble in us: our loving, our laughter, our play, our mission as educators, our dancing, our eating and drinking, our praying, alone or with others, our search for justice and peace, and the many other things that we do in response to that which is deepest within us, is part of our journey to be as Jesus Christ was (see Phil 2:5-11; 4:8-9). Like Jesus, we reach beyond ourselves into the mystery of the divinity that is, at one and the same time, constitutive of our being, yet the object of our search. As Karl Rahner puts it:

¹⁰ The theme of the “deification” now possible for the human condition because of what God has done for us in and through Jesus Christ was a central theme in early Christian tradition, especially (but not only) in the Greek Fathers of the Church. For a very clear description of this process, based in the tradition, and still central to Christian life, see Denis Edwards, *Partaking of God. Trinity, Evolution, and Ecology* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2014), 27-53.

I encounter myself when I find myself in the world and when I ask about God; and when I ask about my essence, I always find myself already in the world and on the way to God. I am both of these at once, and cannot be one without the other.¹¹

Our secularized world would never put it like that! But we are called to reflect more deeply on the truth that we can find the face of God in that confused and confusing world.

Eucharist and Reconciliation

As Karl Rahner puts it, we are “in the world and on the way to God.” This journey, which we travel as individuals, and in communities, is marked by ambiguity. In this situation we must reflect upon the Sacraments of Eucharist and Reconciliation. In their preparation for the second session of the Synod on the Family, on 22 December, 2014, the German Bishops issued a statement in which they rightly declare: “The Eucharist is not a reward for the perfect but a magnanimous remedy and nourishment for the weak.”¹²

The writings of the New Testament, without fail, indicate that such is the case.¹³ The Gospels of Mark (14:17-31) and Matthew (26:20-35) locate Jesus’ final meal with his disciples within a narrative “frame” that tells the audience that he breaks his body and spills his blood for them: betrayers and deniers. Matthew heightens this message by adding to Jesus’ words over the cup from his Markan source clear indication of the purpose of Jesus’ self-gift: “the blood of the covenant poured out for many *for the forgiveness of sins*” (Matt 26:28). Luke’s account of the final meal is more complex, but interlaced with the same

¹¹ Karl Rahner, *Spirit in the World* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1968), 406.

¹² See the report of Christa Pongraz-Lippert, *The National Catholic Reporter*, December 29 (2014), 1.

¹³ For a detailed study of the Eucharistic texts in the Gospels, see Francis J. Moloney, *A Body Broken for a Broken People. Divorce, Remarriage, and the Eucharist* (Manila: Word & Life Publications, 2015).

sentiments, shaped as a farewell discourse as the Lord leaves behind fragile disciples to continue his mission (Luke 22:14-38). In a poignant use of Psalm 41:9 the Lukan Jesus states: “The hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table” (Luke 22:21). For John, the gift of the footwashing, a symbol of Baptism, and the gift of the morsel, a symbol of Eucharist, is the sign of Jesus’ revelation of God’s incredible love for his failing disciples. He loves his own “to the end” (John 13:1). Judas will betray him, Peter will deny him, none of the other disciples, not even the Beloved Disciple, understands what Jesus is doing for them. He tells them why he manifests such love: “I am telling you these things before they happen, so that when they happen, *then you may believe that I AM HE*” (13:18). It is precisely in this crazy self-gift in love to others who do not love him in the same way that he makes God known.¹⁴

Paul is often used to defend the tradition that only the worthy are allowed at the table. But it is not the worthy who are privileged in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. Paul is attacking those who would prevent the poor and the marginalized from sharing the meal, while they eat their fill and drink to inebriation: “Do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?” (11:22). It is to these “holier than thou” people at Corinth that Paul warns: “Examine yourselves, and only then eat the bread and drink of the cup. For all who eat and drink without discerning the body eat and drink judgment to themselves” (vv. 28-29). “The body” certainly means discerning the presence of Jesus, but it also means the “body” of the community of the weak and poor, which they are tearing apart with their sense of superiority.¹⁵

¹⁴ For a fuller study of John 13, see Francis J. Moloney, *Love in the Gospel of John. An Exegetical, Theological, and Literary Study* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013). See also Idem, *A Body Broken for a Broken People*, 175-88.

¹⁵ For a detailed study of the Pauline Eucharistic material (1 Corinthians 10-11), see Moloney, *A Body Broken for a Broken People*, 41-69.

Whatever riches of Eucharistic theology we have developed over the centuries, this is the biblical bedrock upon which all such theology must be built. “The Word of God stands forever” (Isaiah 40:8). Theological and juridical opinion will necessarily come and go as history evolves with its own inner dynamic. Eucharist and Reconciliation are deeply intertwined. The move away from regular reception of Sacramental Reconciliation increases each year. Perhaps this is a way back: an understanding and practice of Eucharist in the light of the Word of God will lead us to accept that the Eucharistic mystery also brings Reconciliation. A claim that we no longer need to experience never-ending conversion and recognition of our sinfulness, cripples our association with God, and a development of a healthy spirituality. However it is celebrated, we must accept our sinfulness, our drift away from the dynamic process of being one with Jesus. Without such honesty and genuine trust in God’s saving presence among us in the gift of his Son, the divine within us shrinks and dies.

A Story: By Way of Conclusion

A feature of Luke’s resurrection account is his insistence that everything took place *on the one day* (see Luke 24:1, 13, 29, 36, 51). The whole of Luke’s Gospel has been directed towards this “day.” As Jesus began his journey towards Jerusalem in 9:51, the narrator commented, “When the days drew near for him to be received up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.” On this resurrection “day” we sense that we are at the end of a long journey. The Lukan use of this theme is at the centre of his account of the journey of two disciples to Emmaus (24:13-35), which will serve as our conclusion. Here we will find the face of God in the compassion of Jesus, the fulfillment of the Scriptures, the forgiveness of sin, and the breaking of the Eucharistic bread.¹⁶

The opening remarks of the journey to Emmaus are an indication of the wrong choice made by two disciples. “That very day” - in the midst of the paschal events – two disciples were going to Emmaus, “about sixty stadia away from Jerusalem” (24:13). They are walking *away from Jerusalem*, the central point of God's story; away from God's journey, making himself known in his Son, from Nazareth (Luke 1-2) to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8; 28:16-31). The paschal events are in the forefront of the disciples’ minds, and the subject of their conversation, as they walk (v. 14), and as the risen Jesus joins them, and “went with them” (v. 15). As the risen one, he “walks with” two disciples who are abandoning God’s saving story. God is behind this encounter. Luke does not say that they were unable to recognize Jesus, but that “their eyes were kept from recognizing him” (v. 16). There is a mysterious “other” directing the presence of Jesus with disciples, indicated by the use of the divine passive voice of the verb. Jesus opens the conversation by asking them what they were discussing with one another as they walked. At Jesus’ question, they stop (v. 16).

A hint of something new has entered the story but it does not last, as one of them, named Cleopas, responds to Jesus’ question. He wonders how Jesus could even ask such a question. Surely, every visitor to Jerusalem would know “the things that have happened there in these days” (v. 18). This is incredible irony, as Cleopas asks Jesus, indeed a visitor to Jerusalem who had journeyed from Galilee to the city, to bring to a climax part of God’s saving design. This journey has been under way since 9:51, when Jesus set his face for Jerusalem, “as the days drew near for him to be received up.” He asks the very “visitor,” to whom these events happened, why he does not know about them. Jesus, who has been at the center of the events, is also the measure of their significance. But the two disciples know

¹⁶ For a more detailed study of Luke 24:13-25, upon which the following is based, see Francis J. Moloney, *The Resurrection of the Messiah. A Narrative Commentary of the Resurrection Accounts in the Four Gospels* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2013), 81-86.

only of the “events,” not what God has done through them. Indeed, “their eyes were kept from recognizing him” (v. 16).

A catechetical-liturgical process begins in v. 19 where, in response to Jesus’ further query about the events, they show their extent of their knowledge of “what has happened” in Jerusalem. Crucial to their response to Jesus is their explanation of their expectations of Jesus: “We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel” (v. 21). They have not understood the significance of the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus. His way of responding to the Father has not fulfilled their hopes for the one who would redeem Israel. But they do know of *the facts* his life, teaching, death and resurrection.

- They know of his life, teaching and miraculous ministry: Jesus of Nazareth, a prophet mighty in word and deed (v. 19).
- They know of his death: “Our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him” (v. 20).
- They know of the events at the tomb: “it is now the third day” (v. 21), women have been at the tomb early in the morning, but “they did not find his body” (v. 23).
- They have even heard the Easter proclamation: there has been a vision of angels who said: “He is alive!” (v. 23).
- If, perhaps the witness of the women was not enough, “some of those who were with us” have been to the tomb, and found it empty. “But him they did not see” (v. 24).

The two disciples on the way to Emmaus know everything ... but him they did not see (vv. 15-17). Thus they do not understand the *significance* of these *events*, and they continue their walk away from Jerusalem.

Jesus chides them for their foolishness. He opens the Scriptures for them, explaining that it was necessary that the Christ should suffer many things to enter his glory (vv. 25-26). He “interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (v. 27). Jesus journeys with these disciples who have abandoned God's journey, and on the way a “liturgy of the Word” takes place. He calls to their memory the necessity for the Christ to suffer in order to enter into his glory (v. 26). Not only did Jesus teach these truths (see 9:22, 44; 18:31-33), but it was the true meaning of “all the Scriptures,” beginning with Moses and the prophets (24:27).

The narrative has reached a turning point. Initiative must come from the erring disciples themselves. Has the word of Jesus made any impact upon them? The Greek of v. 28 reads: “He pretended to be going further.” Jesus has opened the Word of God for them. The disciples must now take some initiative in response to Jesus’ explanation of the Word. They do so generously: “Stay with us for it is toward evening, and the day is now far spent” (v. 29). As the evening of the Easter “day” draws in, the littleness of faith which led them to leave Jerusalem and the eleven is being overcome by the presence of the risen Lord (v. 15) and his opening of the Word (vv. 25-27). A process of repentance and forgiveness is under way, generated by the action of Jesus who walks with his fragile disciples.

At the meal the disciples recognize him in the breaking of the bread (vv. 30-31). He is recognized in the breaking of the bread. The memory of the many meals that Jesus has shared with them, and especially the meal he shared on the night before he died (22:14-38) opens their eyes, and anticipates the many meals that will be celebrated in the future. Touched by Jesus’ word and presence in their failure, the failing disciples turn back on their journey: “And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem” (v. 33). The journey “away from Jerusalem” (v. 13) has been reversed as they turn back “to Jerusalem” (v. 33). Once they arrive back to the place they should never have abandoned and the eleven apostles

upon whom the community is founded, before they can even utter a word about their experience, they find that Easter faith is already alive. They are told: “The Lord has risen indeed and has appeared to Simon” (v. 34). Easter faith has already been born in Jerusalem.

As the Gospel opens, the reader/listener comes to know of a man called “Simon” (4:38). Within the context of a miraculous catch of fish he is called to be a disciple of Jesus and Jesus introduces a new name for him “Peter” (see 5:8). The reader/hearer is reminded of this transformation in the Lukan list of the twelve apostles: “Simon, whom he named Peter” (6:14). From that point on, throughout the whole of the Gospel, he is called “Peter” (see 8:45, 51; 9:20, 28, 32-33; 12:41; 18:28). At the Last Supper, where the mingling of the themes of Jesus’ sharing his table with the broken and the commissioning of his future apostles is found, he is still “Peter” (22:8, 34, 54, 55, 58, 60-61). Only in foretelling his future denials does Jesus emphatically revert to the name he had before he became a disciple: “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you that he might sift you like wheat” (22:31). It is to the failed “Simon” that the risen Lord has appeared, to restore him to his apostolic role (24:34). The name “Simon,” without any link with the apostolic name “Peter” appears only before this man’s call to be a follower of Jesus (4:18) and at the end of the Emmaus story, when two failing disciples are restored to God's saving story which is taking place in Jerusalem. The failed disciples have returned to another disciple who had failed his Lord. This return home, however, has happened because the risen Lord reached out to them in their brokenness, and made himself known to them in the breaking of the bread.

This unforgettable story, the subject of imaginative art, poetry and dramatic representation across the centuries, captures our agenda for hope in a secularized world: contemplate God in Jesus Christ and the Scriptures, recognize our need for God, welcoming his reconciling and nourishing presence in his Sacraments in our journey. We do not walk alone. Jesus of Nazareth is with us. Even in our failures, he leads us home.