



The Shape of the History of the Eucharist

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Abstract

Many authors are hesitant to speak of the Eucharist in the pre-Nicene period and some modern scholarship has attempted to cast doubt on the traditional view that Christ instituted the Eucharist at the Last Supper. This article examines contemporary liturgical studies on the early history of the Eucharist. In light of this it proposes that the traditional view is still the only possibility for an authentic Catholic theology and that liturgical history is, in fact, part of the discipline of Church history that cannot be confused with secular methods of the historical sciences. In this sense, the history of the Eucharist and its later developments must be studied in a manner that acknowledges Providence and the work of the Holy Spirit in the history of the Church. In particular the crystallization of the early “shape” of the liturgy must be understood to be a fundamental element of the divine institution of the Church and not merely a chance selection of one tradition of Eucharistic worship from many equally valid options.

Keywords

Eucharist, liturgical history, sacramental theology, institution of the sacraments, shape of the liturgy

The concept of change in the liturgy has never been an easy one for Christians to deal with. Normally peace-loving Christians can turn violent when faced with a change in their Sunday Eucharist. One only has to think of the recent “liturgy wars” within Roman Catholicism and the rejection of the missal of Paul VI by some groups of Catholics and the similar difficulties with the translation of its third typical edition by others. But today the more serious question facing the Catholic liturgical scholar does not deal with mere translation matters or even with the relatively minor differences between the missals of Pius V and Paul VI,¹ this challenge does not

¹ Benedict XVI is very clear in his recent *motu proprio* that both missals are, in fact, complementary expressions of “two usages of the one Roman rite,” *Summorum Pontificum*

belong to the modern period, but it is found in the earliest stratum of eucharistic tradition.

The Catholic Church teaches that her Eucharist was established by Jesus Christ on Holy Thursday, during the Last Supper that he celebrated with his disciples “on the night before he was betrayed” (1 Cor 11:23) in anticipation of the Cross and Resurrection.² But it is hard to find any modern book on the history of liturgy and published by an established academic publishing house in the English-speaking world that would agree with this. Indeed most scholars today take an overly cautious view of liturgical history and adopt the view of “we just cannot say” regarding the most basic details of the pre-Nicene Eucharist. Indeed some seem to delight in “proving” that we can say little or nothing about early liturgy. Paul Bradshaw, one of the main proponents of this school of thought, can even claim that:

As a result of the great advances that have been made in liturgical scholarship in the last few decades, we now know much less about early eucharistic worship than we once thought that we did. Indeed, it sometimes appears that if things keep on their present rate, it is possible that we shall soon find that we know absolutely nothing at all: for a large part of what current research has achieved has been to demolish theories that had been built on unreliable foundations.³

The purpose of this article is to suggest, pace Bradshaw, that the current theories are not built on unreliable foundations and that, indeed, from a Catholic point of view these theories are quite acceptable.

The first modern students of liturgy in the eighteenth century tried to get back to the ritual of that night of the Last Supper. When faced with the variety of traditional eucharistic prayers in the Western and

(London: CTS, 2007), Art 1, p. 15. Adrian Fortescue gives the outline of the “shape” of the Tridentine Mass of his day; this shape is basically the same as that of the Paul VI missal, *The Mass: A Study of the Roman Liturgy* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1912; reprint Boonville, NY: Preserving Christian Publications, 2007), 216.

² *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1997), # 1337–40. The theory of institution was formally defined in the Council of Trent which stated that “If any one says, that the sacraments of the New Law were not all instituted by Jesus Christ, our Lord . . . let him be anathema.” (The Council of Trent, The Seventh Session, Decree on the Sacraments, Canon 1, DS 1601). This is usually interpreted in light of St Thomas Aquinas’ definition of institution as “the institutor of anything is he who gives it strength and power: as in the case of those who institute laws” (STh III. q. 64 a.2 in the *sed contra*). For a more theological interpretation of this, see Salvatore Marsili, *I Segni del Mistero di Cristo* (Rome: C.L.V. – Editizioni Liturgiche, 1987), 69–90, and regarding the Eucharist and its relationship to the Last Supper, see Joseph Ratzinger, *The Feast of Faith: Approaches to a Theology of the Liturgy*. Graham Harrison, trans. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 33–60.

³ Paul Bradshaw, “Continuity and Change in Early Eucharistic Practice: Shifting Scholarly Perspectives,” in R. N. Swanson, ed., *Continuity and Change in Christian Worship. Papers Read at the 1997 Summer Meeting and the 1998 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 1999), 1.

Eastern Churches, the presumption was made that these had developed from a single common eucharistic liturgy of apostolic times. The main difficulty with this understanding was that most of the proposed reconstructions of the text of the apostolic liturgy were based on *De Traditione Divinae Missae*, a spurious document purporting to be by Proclus, a mid fifth-century bishop of Constantinople.⁴ Basing their theories on pseudo-Proclus these theories thought that “the earliest apostolic liturgies had been very long but were deliberately abridged in later centuries in order to retain the participation of less fervent generations of Christians.”⁵ But by the beginning of the twentieth century scholars realized that *De Traditione Divinae Missae* was, in fact, a forgery and further study seemed to indicate that the various texts of the traditional eucharistic prayers did not seem to have a common textual origin making it nigh impossible to reach a common apostolic text of the eucharistic liturgy. Not surprisingly, this caused some consternation, as it seemed to call the very validity of the sacraments into doubt.

Dom Gregory Dix, an Anglican Benedictine, stepped in to fill this gap with his very influential book, *The Shape of the Liturgy*. While Dix did not support the idea of a common apostolic text, he replaced this with a proposed common “shape” of the eucharistic liturgy that would have been typical for all of the earliest Christians. There is, he said, “even good reason to think that this outline – the Shape – of the Liturgy is of genuinely apostolic tradition.” He assumed that the first part of the eucharistic liturgy, which centred on scripture readings, was imported into early Christian liturgy from the Jewish synagogue service which the apostles would have been familiar with. In Dix’s understanding this liturgy of the Word was followed by a eucharistic celebration. He analysed the actions of Jesus in the Last Supper and saw that he carried out seven actions and that these soon became a universal fourfold eucharistic rite that was common to all Christians: “(1) the offertory; bread and wine are ‘taken’ and placed on the table together. (2) The prayer; the president gives thanks to God over the bread and wine together. (3) The fraction; the bread is broken. (4) The communion; the bread and wine are distributed together.”⁶

⁴ This text is available in PG 65:849–52; for details of this forgery see F.J. Leroy, “Proclus «De Traditione Divinae Missae»: un Faux de C. Palaeocappa,” *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 28 (1962): 288–99.

⁵ John R.K. Fenwick, *Fourth Century Anaphoral Construction Techniques*. Grove Liturgical Studies vol. 45 (Bramcote, Nottingham: Grove Books, 1986), 4. For a modern summary of earlier scholarship see Paul Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy*, 2nd ed. (London: SPCK, 2002), 1–6.

⁶ Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, 2nd ed. (London: Dacre Press, 1945; Reprinted with an Introduction by Simon Jones, London: Continuum, 2005), 48.

As it succeeded in explaining the origins of the eucharistic celebration and maintained the vital connection with the person of Christ, Dix's theory became enormously popular and was incorporated into most studies from the mid-twentieth century until the 1990's. In addition most scholars understood that the development of the eucharistic rite followed a linear model⁷ which shows how various elements were gradually added to the primitive "shape," so that the liturgical families and rites grew gradually and organically from the original apostolic "shape" of the Eucharist.⁸ While not all the evidence fits neatly into the linear model, nonetheless, I propose that today this is still the best model for the Catholic liturgical scholar to follow.

Initially we ought to understand a very simple structure to the liturgy. Basically the primitive shape would be a prayer said over bread and wine (probably mixed with water⁹), this prayer would take place in a Christian assembly, presided over by an Apostle or one of their successors. Naturally the prayer would be influenced by the memories of the practice of Jesus, Jewish meal prayers, and early Christian prayer patterns in general. Then the assembly would receive the eucharistic elements. While it took time to develop a more formal theology, the early Christians did share a core of belief regarding the eucharistic mystery.¹⁰ It was this common faith combined with a common practice, both of which found their origin in Christ, that constituted the beginning of Christian liturgy.

The best example of the "shape" in the pre-Nicene Church is provided by St Justin in his *Apologia*, written around the year 155. Here St Justin is attempting to explain general Christian practice to the Roman emperor Antoninus Pius in the context of various misunderstandings and persecutions of the early Christian. As many of these persecutions centred on the Christians meetings, Justin provides an outline of the Christian celebration of the Eucharist. This outline can be seen in every orthodox celebration of the Eucharist from Justin's

⁷ Perhaps the most popular and influential example of this is the work of Louis Bouyer, *Eucharist: Theology and Spirituality of the Eucharistic Prayer*. C. Quinn, trans. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968).

⁸ When exceptions to this development are found (such as the prayer in the *Didache* which today is generally accepted as being a eucharistic prayer, but which lacks reference to the Last Supper and deals with the cup before the bread), these earlier studies thought of them as being aberrations or eccentricities of individual churches that bore little relation to this linear development, e.g. Joseph A. Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite, its Origins and Development (Missarum Solemnia)*, Francis A. Brunner, trans. (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1951), i, 12.

⁹ The addition of water to the wine in the chalice is traditionally one of the examples of an action of Christ contained in Tradition but not mentioned in Scripture, see Yves Congar, *The Meaning of Tradition* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004; original edition Hawthorne, NY, 1964), 37.

¹⁰ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)*. The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 167–71.

day to our own.¹¹ And even Bradshaw will allow that this general shape was widespread, albeit in very general terms, “long before” the fourth century.¹² Here is Justin’s description:

On the day called Sunday an assembly is held in one place of all who live in town or country, and records of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as time allows.

Then, when the reader has finished, the president in a discourse admonishes and exhorts (us) to imitate these good things.

Then we all stand up together and send up prayers; and as we said before, when we have finished praying bread and wine and water are brought up, and the president likewise sends up prayers and thanksgivings to the best of his ability, and the people assent, saying the Amen; and the (elements over which) thanks have been given are distributed, and everyone partakes; and they are sent through the deacons to those who are not present.

And the wealthy who so desire give what they wish, as each chooses; and what is collected is deposited with the president.¹³

While there are not many other descriptions of the eucharistic celebration from the pre-Nicene era, there are a lot of hints that there was a canonical way of celebrating the Eucharist. In the *First Letter of Clement*, written at the end of the first century, Pope Clement states that there is a prescribed order of celebration (unfortunately without telling us exactly what that order is). Here we also find that already a sacrificial hermeneutic has entered into the interpretation of the celebration.¹⁴ This sacrificial hermeneutic, while by no means being the only valid interpretation, has remained as a constitutive element of the understanding of the Eucharist.¹⁵

¹¹ Maxwell E. Johnson, “The Apostolic Tradition,” in Geoffrey Wainwright and Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, eds. *The Oxford History of Christian Worship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 52. Following a theory of Von Harnack in 1891 some scholars follow him in proposing that the text of Justin’s description of the Eucharist has been changed from mentioning bread and water to bread and wine, see McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists*, 151–155. Although a more recent study tends to see Justin as proposing a Eucharist celebrated with wine and not water, see Colin Buchanan, *Justin Martyr on Baptism and the Eucharist*. Joint Liturgical Studies vol. 64 (Norwich: SCM-Canterbury, 2007), 21–3.

¹² Paul F. Bradshaw, *Eucharistic Origins*, Alcuin Club Collections vol. 80 (London: SPCK, 2004), 146.

¹³ *First Apology* 67.3–6 in Anton Hänggi and Irmgard Pahl, *Prex Eucharistica: Textus e Variis Liturgiis Antiquioribus Selecti* (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires Fribourg Suisse, 1968), 70–3, English translation from R.C.D. Jasper and G.J. Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed*, 3d ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990), 29–30.

¹⁴ *1 Clement* 40–1 in Michael W. Holmes, ed. and trans., *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 98–9. Also see Fortescue, *The Mass*, 11–13.

¹⁵ Abbot Vonier, *A Key to the Doctrine of the Eucharist*, 2nd ed. (London: Burns & Oates, 1925; Republished with a Preface by Peter Kreeft and an Introduction by Aidan

In the late second century St Irenaeus informs us that the Eucharist “is the offering which the church received from the apostles and which it offers throughout the whole world, to God who provides us with nourishment, the first-fruits of divine gifts in this new covenant.”¹⁶ This way of celebrating is contrasted to that of the Gnostics who have a different way of celebrating which does not come from the Lord.¹⁷ In another fragment of St Irenaeus, preserved in Eusebius of Caesarea’s *Ecclesiastical History* (written about 320 AD), he recounts that when St Polycarp visited Rome during the reign of Pope Anicetus (c.157–c.168), the pope invited Polycarp to preside the Eucharist and this in spite of their unresolved disagreement on the calculation of the date of Easter. Given that Polycarp was able to preside the Eucharist in the Church of Rome, it is obvious that both Polycarp at Smyrna and Anicetus at Rome had a common understanding of how the Eucharist should be celebrated.¹⁸ While these historical testimonies may not be enough evidence for the modern critic, we have to realize that for this time period it actually constitutes quite a lot of evidence. A modern author claims that even two or three documents from the pre-Nicene period in fact constitute “a tsunami of information.”¹⁹

Gradually the classical eucharistic prayers evolved from this simple beginning. But it is crucial to understand that here there is more than a casual evolution and that the Holy Spirit aided the Church in her canonization of the eucharistic prayer.²⁰ While the earliest forms of this prayer may have been very simple or even lacked elements that would later become constitutive, such as the *Sanctus*²¹ and maybe even at a very early stage the Words of

Nichols, Bethesda, MD: Zaccheus Press, 2003) and José Antonio Sayés, *El Misterio Eucarístico* (Madrid: Ediciones Palabra, 2003), 163–454.

¹⁶ *Adversus Haereses* 4.17.5 in David N. Power, ed. and trans., *Irenaeus of Lyons on Baptism and Eucharist: Selected Texts with Introduction, Translation and Annotation*. Alcuin/GROW Liturgical Study 18 (Bramcote: Grove Books, 1991), 16.

¹⁷ *Adversus Haereses* 1.13.2 in *ibid.*, 13–14.

¹⁸ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.24.

¹⁹ Robert F. Taft, *Thorough Their Own Eyes: Liturgy as the Byzantines Saw it* (Berkeley, CA: InterOrthodox Press, 2006), 68.

²⁰ I will admit that the general historian may have difficulties in believing that this happened under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but this is precisely the difference between a Catholic and non-Catholic interpretation of history as “the Catholic interpretation [of history] finds no difficulty in accepting the arbitrary and unpredictable character of historical change, since it sees everywhere the signs of a divine purpose and election.” Christopher Dawson, *Dynamics of World History*, John J. Mulloy, ed., with a new introduction by Dermot Quinn (Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 2002, original edition Sheed and Ward, NY 1958), 270.

²¹ Bryan Spinks, *The Sanctus in the Eucharistic Prayer* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 104–121.

Institution themselves,²² the form of the prayer gradually evolved. The very earliest celebrations of the Eucharist did not rely on written texts; there was a certain oral commonality to these celebrations. The bishop or priest who presided the celebration prayed using familiar structures, vocabulary and word patterns. The ritual grew from “habit and custom”²³ where the early Church, aided by the Holy Spirit, developed a more complete common shape of the eucharistic liturgy starting from and respecting the great gift of the Eucharist which Christ entrusted to his bride the Church. At this stage there was a “uniformity of type rather than detail.”²⁴

But this is not to say that there were no exceptions to this “shape.” The issue is how do we treat these exceptions? Do we see them as aberrations or accept them as equally valid alternative practices? Andrew McGowan catalogues many of these departures from the “shape” in his work *Ascetic Eucharists*. The work starts with a helpful analysis of meals and food and drink in the ancient context. But then he continues to examine all the evidence remotely connected with Christianity, giving as much weight to “Radical Pseudepigrapha” as to orthodox Christianity.²⁵

Of the mainstream texts McGowan examines the most famous of these is St Cyprian’s *Letter 63 to Caecilius*. Here St Cyprian is addressing the problem of some confessors who were reported to celebrate the Eucharist using a chalice filled with water and not wine. When faced with the fact that apparently some priests in third century North Africa celebrated a Eucharist with water and not wine, the modern student has two options. One can either believe that both wine and water were equally viable options in the early Church and it is by a simple quirk of fate that wine won out in the bigger historical picture.²⁶ Alternatively, if one believes that the eucharistic liturgy is something divine and that the Holy Spirit has protected it in the history of the Church, then one has to hold that these celebrants in third century North African were simply wrong, thus agreeing with St Cyprian that it “is against evangelical and apostolic practice that in certain places water is being offered in the chalice of the Lord that by itself cannot form an image of Christ’s blood.”²⁷ We should not

²² Robert F. Taft, “Mass Without the Consecration? The Historic Agreement on the Eucharist between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East Promulgated 26 October 2001,” *Worship* 77 (2003), 482–509.

²³ Adrian Fortescue, *The Mass: A Study of the Roman Liturgy* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1912; reprint Boonville, NY: Preserving Christian Publications, 2007), 50.

²⁴ Fortescue, *The Mass*, 52.

²⁵ Andrew McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists: Food and Drink in Early Christian Ritual Meals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 175–98.

²⁶ This is the view preferred by McGowan, see *Ascetic Eucharists*, 11.

²⁷ *Letter 63*, 11.1 in G. F. Diercks, ed., *Sancti Cypriani Episcopi Opera. Pars III.2*. Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 3 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1996), 403. English translation

be surprised that some early Christians simply got things wrong: even today it is not unknown for priests who acting in good (albeit badly formed) conscience to celebrate invalid sacraments.²⁸ Furthermore, what is of note in this North African example is not that we have an early exception to the “shape” of the Eucharist but the fact that the Church condemned heterodox liturgical practices, both those of heretics and those committed by those who were blameless in other respects.

Another area where contemporary liturgical scholarship has challenged the accepted historical narrative is the case of the early church order commonly called the *Apostolic Tradition*. Most of the classical twentieth-century histories of the liturgy give pride of place to this document.²⁹ While this document has been known for a long time, it was only at the beginning of the twentieth century that it came to be attributed to St Hippolytus who was active in Rome in the third century.³⁰ In turn this identification gave it an important place in the renewal of the books of the Roman rite in the wake of Vatican II.

However the textual history of the *Apostolic Tradition* is complicated and while it was originally written in Greek only small fragments of the original survive. This has meant that every modern editor of the work has had to make some subjective interpretations in their reconstruction of the original document from an assortment of fragments of the *Apostolic Tradition* in various ancient languages.³¹ In the early 1990's Marcel Metzger argued that it is unwise to treat the *Apostolic Tradition* as being authored by Hippolytus and that rather than seeing it as a single coherent document, it might be better to see it as a collection of disparate canons.³² Bradshaw took this up in his influential textbook on the early liturgy,³³ and in 2002, together with two colleagues, Bradshaw published a new edition of the *Apostolic*

from Allen Brent, ed. and trans., *St Cyprian of Carthage: On the Church, Select Letters*, Popular Patristics Series vol. 33 (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 2006), 180.

²⁸ An example that springs to mind is that of those priests who attempt to consecrate gluten-free hosts. While no one would doubt their pastoral zeal, they are, in fact, using an invalid matter, see John Huels, *Liturgy and Law: Liturgical Law in the System of Roman Catholic Canon Law* (Chicago, IL: Midwest Theological Forum, 2006), 198.

²⁹ See, for example, Bouyer, *Eucharist*, 158–82.

³⁰ For background to the figure of Hippolytus see Allen Brent, *Hippolytus and the Roman Church in the Third Century: Communities in Tension before the Emergence of a Monarch-Bishop* (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

³¹ The most important of the early editions are Bernard Botte, *La Tradition Apostolique de Saint Hippolyte* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1963), Gregory Dix, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St Hippolytus of Rome, Bishop and Martyr*, 2nd ed. (London: SPCK, 1968) and Geoffrey Cuming, *Hippolytus: A Text for Students* (Bramcote: Grove Liturgical Study 8, 1976).

³² Marcel Metzger, “Enquêtes Autour de la Prétendue «Tradition Apostolique» *Ecclesia Orans* 9 (1992): 7–36; “A Propos des Règlements Ecclésiastiques et de la Prétendue *Tradition Apostolique*.” *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 66 (1992): 249–61.

³³ Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 82–3.

Tradition.³⁴ Here they make no attempt to reconstruct an original text of the document but merely to provide English translations of the various sources. While this edition is undoubtedly useful to scholars, it must be argued that it suffers from a fatal flaw: it is not really an edition of the *Apostolic Tradition*, but rather a sourcebook. Whatever the case for Hippolytan authorship or its original provenance and date, there must have existed some early Christian document, a document that enjoyed some popularity in the early Church, which formed the basis of the later adaptations.³⁵ One would also have hoped that the team of editors of the 2002 edition would have felt themselves more capable of producing a proposed reconstruction than the man on the street, who, if all he has to work with is the 2002 edition, is obliged to reconstruct some form of the *Apostolic Tradition* by himself.³⁶

This recent work has left scholars perplexed as to how to use the *Apostolic Tradition* in their historical work. It has also led some to omit treatment of it altogether in their work on early Christian liturgy. This in turn has added to the general confusion regarding historical development of the Eucharist in the pre-Nicene period and it would seem that some scholars even enjoy this fact. Fortunately, some of the most recent scholarship has once again started to use this source.³⁷

But the basic theological issue is not about the historical authenticity of one document or another, but whether today we understand the early Church as a varied confederation of divergent tendencies and groups or admit that the first Christians “had one heart and soul” (Acts 4:32). In the first centuries was there a basic unanimity of practice and belief despite variant liturgical practices or was

³⁴ Paul F. Bradshaw, Maxwell E. Johnson and L. Edward Phillips, *The Apostolic Tradition: A Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2002).

³⁵ Paul De Clerk, “The Apostolic Tradition: A Commentary, 2002’ (*Note de lecture*),” *La Maison-Dieu* 236 (2003/4), 183–4.

³⁶ In fact Maxwell Johnson when he edited the new edition of Whitaker’s *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy* was unable to use the 2002 text of the *Apostolic Tradition* that he himself helped edit. Instead he used Geoffrey Cuming’s edition of 1976. See E. C. Whitaker, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy: Revised and Expanded Edition*. 3rd ed. Maxwell E. Johnson, ed. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2003), 4–8. Interestingly enough Alistair Steward-Sykes has also recently published his own edition of the *Apostolic Tradition* where, following in the footsteps of the earlier editors, he provides a proposed reconstruction of the text and retains the traditional attribution of the document to Hippolytus (*Hippolytus On the Apostolic Tradition: An English Version with Introduction and Commentary*, Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 2001). A comparison between the two editions is provided by John F. Baldwin, in “Hippolytus and the *Apostolic Tradition*: Recent Research and Commentary,” *Theological Studies* 64 (2003): 520–42. Later on a debate between the various parties continues in the number 2–3 (2004) edition of *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* which is dedicated almost exclusively to this topic.

³⁷ E.g. Christopher Page, *The Christian West and Its Singers: The First Thousand Years* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 50–3. Even the most recent work by Bradshaw treats the *Apostolic Tradition* in a more benign way, *Reconstructing Early Christian Worship* (London: SPCK, 2009), 23.

everyone free to believe what he liked and whatever put him best in touch with his inner self? When in the late first century St Ignatius of Antioch speaks of “one Eucharist”³⁸ are we simply to dismiss him off hand as being one of those “proto-Orthodox” whom fate allowed to win the early Christian power struggles and later to rewrite Christian history from their own biased and intolerant point of view? Or is a practicing Catholic allowed to believe that Ignatius was, in fact, correct and that the Church was founded by Christ with a vital sacramental basis and that perhaps the most important part of this is the Eucharist instituted by Christ himself? Otherwise we have to side with some modern scholars who would propose a multitude of contradictory practices in the early Church.³⁹

At its heart, the problem of the history of the Eucharist is not so much an analysis of the evidence. This is especially true for the early period where there are so many lacunae in our knowledge and the discovery of even a single new manuscript could revolutionize our understanding. The Faith of the Church cannot be enslaved to the vagaries of archaeology and the survivals of pre-Nicene liturgical manuscripts. The problem is, rather, one of a hermeneutic of history. How is the Catholic scholar to approach the study of the Eucharist?

Unfortunately, even among Catholic historians many avoid attributing historical developments to the action of God and interpret the facts of history in a completely secular manner.⁴⁰ While the historian must take all of the evidence into account, ultimately what takes precedence must be the unity of the divine deposit of faith and not any single element in a historical reconstruction. As a result of this, there will probably be times when a Catholic historian will be rejected by his non-Catholic confrères:

It is very difficult, perhaps even impossible, to explain the Christian view of history to a non-Christian, since it is necessary to accept the Christian faith in order to understand the Christian view of history, and those who reject the idea of a divine revelation are necessarily obliged to reject the Christian view of history as well.⁴¹

³⁸ “Take care, therefore to participate in the one Eucharist (for there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup that leads to unity through his blood; there is one altar, just as there is one bishop, together with the council of presbyters and the deacons, my fellow servants), in order that whatever you do, you do in accordance with God.” *The Letter of Ignatius to the Philadelphians* 4 in Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 239.

³⁹ E.g. Johnson, “The Apostolic Tradition,” 44–50 and Bryan Spinks, “Beware of Liturgical Horses! An English Interjection on Anaphoral Evolution,” *Worship* 59 (1985): 211–9.

⁴⁰ Warren H. Carroll “Banning the Supernatural: Why Historians Must Not Rule Out the Action of God in History,” in Donald J. D’Elia and Patrick Foley, eds, *The Catholic as Historian* (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2006), 99–107.

⁴¹ Dawson, *Dynamics of World History*, 247.

How then are we to interpret the history of the Eucharist? There are manifest differences in the way the Eucharist has been celebrated in different ages.⁴² There has clearly been development in the shape of the Eucharist. Perhaps the best way to understand this development is to apply the category of the development of Doctrine as championed by Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman. Newman understood the development of Doctrine as being something natural: as in physiology the fully-grown being is the same as the child, so the fully-grown doctrine is the same as that of the primitive Church. In this development change is good and necessary, as he famously quipped, “to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.”⁴³ If we apply this to the Eucharist as celebrated today in the majority of Catholic parishes using the Paul VI Missal, then we are left with only one question:

The only question that can be raised is whether the said Catholic faith, as now held, is logically, as well as historically, the representative of the ancient faith. This then is the subject, to which I have as yet addressed myself, and I have maintained that modern Catholicism is nothing else but simply the legitimate growth and complement, that is, the natural and necessary development, of the doctrine of the early church, and that its divine authority is included in the divinity of Christianity.⁴⁴

Today’s Eucharist, in its different forms but with a common shape, is the result of a “legitimate growth.” In this growth we must maintain that we are dealing with a single organism and not evolution, as for Newman development can never be confused with Darwinian

⁴² However in the study of liturgy it is very important to go beyond the ritual texts. While there has been development in the texts of the prayers used in the Eucharist over the centuries, these prayer texts have remained remarkably stable. The real and major change has been in how Christians have understood these texts and the ritual gestures and artistic settings that accompany the texts. To help us to appreciate the historical development of the meaning given to the liturgical rites, see Enrico Mazza, *La Celebrazione Eucaristica: Genesi del Rito e Sviluppo dell’Interpretazione* (Bologna: EDB, 2003).

⁴³ John Henry Cardinal Newman, *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1878, reprinted Notre Dame, IN: The University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 40. The view of Newman, while it was sometimes considered revolutionary in the nineteenth century, and which prepared for the theological renewal of the twentieth, is not that different from the medieval understanding of development. For example, in the fifth century, the “second rule” of St Vincent of Lérins is remarkably similar to Newman’s proposal. Vincent says that “progress means that each thing is enlarged within itself while alteration implies that one thing is transformed into something else . . . But this progress must be made according to its own type, that is, in accord with the same doctrine, in the same meaning, and in the same judgment” see, *The First Instruction* 23 (PL 50.667–8), a convenient translation can be found in the Second Reading of the Office of Readings in the Liturgy of the Hours for Friday of the Twenty-Seventh week of Ordinary Time. For more on Vincent see Thomas G. Guarino, “Tradition and Doctrinal Development: Can Vincent of Lérins Still Teach the Church?” *Theological Studies* 67 (2006): 34–72.

⁴⁴ Newman, *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, 169.

evolution. Development takes place within the life span of a single living organism, but, according to Darwin's understanding of evolution, two distinct species could evolve from a common ancestor.⁴⁵ This is not the case with the Christian Sacraments. Christ did not bequeath us some liturgical raw material from which various Sacraments could evolve, in such a way that certain bodies of Christians have the Eucharist and others have some other sort of a liturgical service that, while not eucharistic in the Catholic sense, is equally valid and in accordance with the mind of Christ. No, the Eucharist is an eternal reality and is constitutive of the Christian Church, to the degree that if a body of Christians no longer validly celebrates this Sacrament that body cannot be considered to be a Church. This means that the Eucharist celebrated today in a Catholic parish in New Jersey, is the same Eucharist as was celebrated by the Fathers of the Council of Trent, is the same as was celebrated by Gregory the Great and is the same as was established by Jesus Christ in the "days of his flesh."⁴⁶

This idea of development is taken up by the Second Vatican Council in *Dei Verbum* 8 which states that the Church's worship has been handed on from the Apostles and is a constitutive element of the Church, but that throughout the centuries there is a "growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down."⁴⁷

In proposing a different hermeneutic in the study of liturgical history, I am not attempting to discredit the work of other scholars, personally I spend most of my leisure time reading their latest work. Indeed, it is their duty to present the historical evidence of early Christian liturgy to the best of their abilities. It is not merely a matter of there being an objectively right and wrong way to interpret historical evidence that every scholar of every view can agree on. The reality is, however, that there is a specifically Catholic way to interpret the history of the Church and her liturgy and that this truth has too often been forgotten. The Catholic historian of liturgy can and must use all the historical research available, even if he is working within a different worldview to his non-Catholic confreres. Therefore the history of liturgy is a discipline of Catholic theology that has the important task of helping people understand the truths of the Catholic Faith and the practitioner of this discipline, as a Catholic

⁴⁵ James Pereiro, "Newman, Tradition and Development," in Philippe Lefebvre and Colin Mason, eds, *John Henry Newman: Doctor of the Church* (Oxford: Family Publications, 2007), 241.

⁴⁶ Heb 5:7 see *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, number 2 (3rd ed., Washington D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2002).

⁴⁷ This intuition of *Dei Verbum* is borne out in *La Celebrazione Eucaristica*, Mazza's recent study where he analyses the history of the Eucharist not so much from the aspect of the change in the rite but as a development of the Church's understanding of the Eucharist.

theologian, must approach his task with a critical attitude whose gaze has been purified by faith.⁴⁸ This explanation can change with the passage of time and the developments of historical scholarship at large, but the Faith itself cannot be swayed by various theories and brought into doubt by the chance survivals of early texts. The fact that Christ established the Eucharist at the Last Supper, and that this is the same Eucharist that is still celebrated by the Catholic Church must be definitely held. I, for one, want no part in any fellowship which believes that the Eucharist of the Catholic Church is simply a chance survival of one eucharist among many, and that the Church conceivably could be better off using some other model. No!; the great joy of Catholicism is that we have access to the unique Eucharist that our Lord instituted “in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross throughout the centuries until He should come again, and so to entrust to His beloved spouse, the Church, a memorial of His death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a paschal banquet ‘in which Christ is eaten, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us.’”⁴⁹

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⁴⁸ For more on this duty see the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith’s *Instruction on The Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian* (London: CTS, 1990), Art 9, p. 8.

⁴⁹ *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 47.