

Asbury Theological Seminary

Swallowing the Holy Spirit Feathers and All; A Guide for Spiritual Seekers looking to Deepen
their Relationship with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

Jane Shoemaker

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Dedicated in gratitude to Charles Shoemaker, my soul-mate and biggest supporter, and Dr.
Steven O'Malley, mentor, and friend.

Introduction to the Issues at Hand:

In the past twenty years, much research in ministry and the social sciences examined a segment of the United States population known as the Millennials. These are young adults born roughly between 1982 and 2004. Both secular and Christian sources indicate that many of these young people are spiritual seekers. Many are searching for a personal relationship with Christ. Others are looking to deepen their already existing relationship with the Lord (Baumman 301-322; Setran & Kiesling 6-27). In any case, these young adults are disillusioned with the religious duty conceptions of their parents and the older generations in the United States and are looking for a real and authentic relationship with the living God (Bauman 301-322).

Although, originally used as a criticism, Martin Luther's pithy observation of Thomas Muntzer that he "had swallowed the Holy Ghost, feathers and all," could also be used to describe Millennials who are starving for the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives (Bainton 264). In a way, they are looking for ways to swallow the Holy Spirit. They are looking for ways to make him an integral part of their lives.

The theological study of the Eucharist has great value for the Millennial who seeks to deepen their relationship with the Lord. Historically the church perceived the Eucharist as the place where God and the human individual meet. It's the place where the bond between God and the individual is forged and strengthened through the power of the Holy Spirit (Dix 1-11).

The purpose of this essay is to serve as a guide for Millennials seeking a deeper relationship with God through the power of the Holy Spirit. Outlined here, is the unique ways in which the Holy Spirit comes to commune with the believer in four different Eucharistic traditions. These traditions are as follows; Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, and Presbyterianism.

Communing with God in Eastern Orthodoxy:

One of the oldest Eucharist traditions still in use is the Eastern Orthodox liturgy, originating with St. Basil the Great (O'Malley *The Sacraments as Living Tradition*). In the Orthodox Tradition, all of life is mysterious and miraculous to some degree. Life itself is a sacrament in which God's presence can be found and felt (Schememann 14-22). There is no arbitrary delineation between the material and spiritual realms. Everything can be a medium through which God's presence can radiate. Hence the Orthodox use icons to pray. Eastern Orthodox Iconography depicts Christ, the Virgin Mary, deacons and angelic messengers, and other saints. The purpose of such iconography is to draw the believer upward to heaven to commune with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Wybrew 1-11). Likewise, incense is used to draw the believer's prayers up into heaven (Schememann 14-22).

The function of the rich, Eastern Orthodox Liturgy, is to draw the congregation upward to heaven. The movement toward heaven occurs through the power of the Holy Spirit (Schemmeman 28). Eastern Orthodox theologian, Andrew Schmemann, emphasizes that the first half of the Orthodox liturgy transports the congregation to heaven and that last half of the Orthodox liturgy brings God down to earth (Schmemann 41). A great deal of emphasis is on the Holy Spirit descending to transform the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharistic liturgy. This is known as the *epiclesis* (Schememann 28- 39). Schmemann understands the purpose of the *epiclesis* as transforming the church into the body of Christ, and inaugurating the Kingdom of God on earth (Schememann 44). In the Eastern Orthodox understanding of the Eucharistic liturgy there is a great sense of a mystical communion of the believer with the Holy Trinity. This mystical communion is then expressed outside the church doors to bring about the healing of the nations (Schememann 45-46).

To the Western observer of the Orthodox liturgy, constant movement is occurring. The priest engages offers prayers and incense for the body of believers. He engages in the sanctifying of the congregation through incense. The choir also sings prayers to heaven, while offerings are made by the priest. While all of this is going on, the congregation is quietly following along in the liturgy, speaking only during infrequently prescribed times. Many Western observers report the feeling of passivity. They feel as though they are not contributing to worship (Wybrew 1-11). However, individuals with strong sensing personalities may benefit greatly from Orthodox worship, and feel closely connected to God through the beautiful icons and the smell of incense.

Questions for Sincere Seekers:

When one considers worshipping in an Eastern Orthodox Congregation, answering the following questions may be helpful.

- Do I have a contemplative personality? Will I feel satisfied by following along in the liturgy, without doing much singing or speaking?
- Would viewing many Christian images strengthen my experience of the Lord?
- How might the use of incense strengthen my faith?
- How might the moment of *epiclesis* strengthen my closeness to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?
- How might, Eastern Orthodox worship, encourage me to help the body of Christ bring God's Kingdom to earth?

Roman Catholicism, Experiencing Christ's Sacrificial Love:

At first glance, Eastern Orthodox Eucharistic tradition and Western rites look nothing alike. Some observers describe the Eastern Orthodox service as joyful, or bustling with activity. The Roman Rite emanates a solemn feeling or mood. This somber feeling is in keeping with the Roman Catholic understanding that the Eucharist is a re-sacrifice of Christ (Thompson, *The Roman Rite*, 27; Wybrew 1-11). However, when the spiritual seeker investigates beyond the affective differences between Eastern Orthodox liturgy, and the Roman Catholic liturgy, a very similar kind of spiritual movement becomes evident in both. Both Eastern Orthodox Eucharistic tradition and Roman Catholic Eucharistic tradition involve movement upward to heaven, and the movement of heaven downward toward earth. In both traditions these two movements bring the individual believer into the presence of God. In the Eastern Orthodox Church the movement down from heaven occurs within the *epiclesis* (Schmemmann 39). In the Roman Rite, the movement down from heaven occurs in several places, not just primarily in the “epiclesis.”

The first movement from heaven begins in the preface of the Low Mass. At the beginning of the preface, the priest crosses himself in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then he proclaims to the congregation that he is going upward to the altar of God to offer sacrifice for them. A journey picture emerges of the priest going upward. Here is the first invocation, “The light of thy presence, the fulfillment of thy promise, let these be my escort, bringing me safe to thy holy mountain, to the tabernacle where thou dwellest” (Order of Low Mass 55). It’s clear that the priest is journeying upward, and the presence of God (in some form) is descending to walk with the priest. The next lines of the preface then indicate that the presence of God is viewed as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The priest describes waiting on God to come to his aid. When God comes, glory is proclaimed to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Order of Low Mass 55).

The second descending of the Holy Spirit occurs in the Offertory. Only this time, is it an invocation of the Holy Spirit alone without the Father or the Son. The role of the Holy Spirit comes to bless the gifts of bread and wine (Order of Low Mass 67). The priest invokes the Holy Spirit with these words, “Come, thou sanctifier, almighty, everlasting God, and bless these sacrificial gifts, prepared for the glory of thy holy name” (Order of Low Mass 67).

Historical theologian, Bard Thompson, points out that the overall conception of the Low Mass in Roman Catholicism is an epiphany. It is God’s revelation coming down from heaven (Thompson, *The Roman Rite*, 42-43). After the Preface to the Canon is given, the Preface of the Holy Trinity is spoken by the congregation. Glory is then given to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in gratitude for the revelation that will presently come down from heaven (Order of Low Mass 69). Here the work of the Holy Spirit is very subtle in contrast to the *epiclesis*. Nevertheless, honor must be given to him before Christ can bring the revelation down from heaven. The work of the Holy Spirit is more subtle than in the Eastern Rite but vitally necessary. If the Holy Spirit is not blessed alongside the Father and the Son, there is no revelation in the form of the body and blood of Christ (Order of Low Mass 69).

If one is trying to decide whether to worship regularly in a Roman Catholic congregation, a few things must be held in perspective. Even though there is a strong emphasis on the presence of God in the Roman Rite, this presence is mediated mostly through the priest. The priest speaks the words of consecration, and the bread and wine are transformed into the real body and blood of Christ (Dix 281). Similarly, it is the priest who journeys to heavens alter to offer sacrifice for the congregation (Order of Low Mass 55). This extreme focus on the actions of the priest may leave many laity with the feeling that they have no participation in the Eucharist. In fact, during the High Middle Ages, the laity was perceived as so unessential to the Eucharist, that the blood

of Christ was denied to them (Thompson, *Luther*, 95-96; Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, Lull, Third Edition, e-book). Although now both the body and blood of Christ is given to the laity, the basic centering on priestly activity has not.

Questions for Sincere Seekers:

When deciding to worship in a Roman Catholic religious context, the spiritual seeker may need to ask the questions below.

- Do I agree with the Roman Catholic view that Christ is re-sacrificed during the Eucharist?
- Am I confident that the priest has the authority to offer sacrifices for my sins?
- How might the multiple invocations for the presence of the Holy Trinity in the Roman rite, strengthen my faith?
- How important is it to me, that I worship in a congregation that believes that the real body and blood of Jesus are offered to the people in the Eucharist?
- How does taking the real body and blood of Christ encourage me to help the body of Christ bring God's Kingdom to earth?

Luther's Renovation of the Roman Rite:

On Christmas Day in 1521, Martin Luther, set about to renovate the Roman Rite of Eucharist. Luther felt that the basic structure of the Roman Rite was sound, but he took issue with the idea that communion was a re-sacrifice of Christ performed by the priest. In fact, he saw worship as a gift of God, *beneficium*, rather than the sacrifice of the priest, *sacrificium*. Luther's understanding of Eucharist was integrated into his larger understanding of salvation by faith. What is now known as, sola fideism, was in direct contrast with the Roman Catholic

Scholastic teaching of salvation through the merit of the priest (Thompson, *Luther*, 95-103). Simultaneously, Luther also took issue with the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, articulated by St. Thomas Aquinas. Luther insisted that the bread and wine were really the body and blood of Christ, but that no change had been wrought by the priest elevating the elements (O'Malley, *The Ascendant Church*). Phillip Melanchthon would describe this view of the real presence as consubstantiation because the real presence of Christ was always with the bread and wine (O'Malley, *The Ascendant Church*).

Luther specified that Christ was present as the living Word of God (Luther, *The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ*, Lull, Third Edition, e-book). Luther scholar, Paul Althaus, points out that an understanding of Christ as the Word of God is the key to all of Luther's theology. Christ is present as the living Word in communion and present as the living Word in preaching (Althaus 4-88). Eventually what emerged from Luther, were two forms of worship based on the Roman Rite without the Canon or Elevation of elements. The *Formula Missae*, was the Latin Mass without the Canon or Elevation of the elements, used for special occasions. The *Deutsche Messe*, was the mass in the German language commonly used for the people (Thompson, *Luther*, 95-103).

What the spiritual seeker will likely encounter at the Lutheran Church is a structured, orderly, and solemn Eucharistic liturgy bearing many similarities with the Roman Rite. Most Lutheran liturgies today combine elements of the *Formula Missae*, and the *Dutsche Messe* to create a liturgy that emphasizes salvation by grace, and the ministry of the Word (Wengert 27-38). When approaching Lutheran worship, one must be ready to experience the Word through the power of the Holy Spirit. The key difference in Lutheran liturgy and the Roman Rite is a much longer sermon or homily. Luther placed great priority on the ministry of the Word of God.

He proclaimed that all worship must have a sermon. It is through the Word that the Holy Spirit communes with the believer (Thompson, *Luther*, 95-104). Keep in mind that worshiping in the Lutheran context requires much concentration and attentiveness to God's Word.

Questions for Sincere Seekers:

When worshiping in the Lutheran context, one should probably ask these questions.

- Do I believe that Christ is really present with the bread and wine as the Word of God?
- How might the theology that Christ is present with the bread and wine strengthen my faith?
- Am I willing to pay close attention to the Scriptures being read, and the message being brought? Am I willing to let the Holy Spirit speak to me through these means?
- Am I willing to participate in the service by reading responsive readings, and Scriptures out loud?
- How central is understanding Jesus, as the Word of God, in my daily walk with him?

John Calvin and the Real Presence:

While Martin Luther, generally retained as much of the Roman Rite as possible, John Calvin dismantled it with zeal. He sought to replace it with a liturgical form based on Scripture and the teaching of the early church alone. In 1536, Calvin began creating a new liturgical form and published it in the *Institutes* of 1536. During the following decade, Calvin refined his understanding of the liturgy and created two major forms of church prayers used in his churches in Geneva and Strassburg (Thompson, *Calvin*, 185-196).

While these two forms differed, the structure was essentially the same. The service began with a confession of sin. The pastor would read the confession of sin. The congregation

confessed the words silently in their heart. The congregation confessed that they grieved God, and offered him true repentance. They beseeched the Lord for his mercy and the grace of the Holy Spirit. In Strassburg's liturgy only, an absolution was given.

Then the congregation would sing the first five commandments. A Psalm was sung, and the Holy Spirit's grace was prayed for by the minister. A collect was prayed for illumination. A lesson was read and the sermon was given. Then communion was offered at the end of the sermon on the days it was celebrated (Calvin 197-202). Calvin desired communion to be practiced weekly, but he met resistance to this in his church at Geneva (Thompson, *Calvin*, 188-189). The pastor then read what was called the Reformed *Sursum corda* entreating the believer to lift their hearts to heaven and to seek Jesus Christ. The *Sursum corda* was added by William Farel, Calvin's copastor in Geneva (Thompson 187). The church recited the Lord's Prayer, and the Apostles Creed while the table was being prepared, and then a thanksgiving was offered to God after communion (Thompson 188-189).

In both Strassburg and Geneva, Calvin developed prayers emphasizing the real presence of Jesus Christ in the bread and wine (Calvin 202-208). The way in which Calvin understood the real presence of Christ, differed from Luther in one major way. Luther emphasized that Christ was present as the Word. He came down from heaven to be with the bread and the wine. Calvin understood Christ as reigning in heaven with the Father. For Calvin, the congregation was transported by the power of the Holy Spirit upward into the presence of Christ (Dix 632-635). This concept of a heavenly transportation was echoed in the Reformed *Sursum corda* (Thompson 187). For this reason, the Eucharist in Calvin's liturgy has a great deal of similarity to the Eastern Rite. Both emphasize powerful presence of the Holy Spirit transporting the congregation to heavenly realms (Dix 632-635; Schememann 28-39). This powerful pneumatology is also

combined with a strong ecclesiology that conceptualizes the congregation as the Kingdom of God on earth (O'Malley, *The Church as the Re-creation of Divine Order*).

However, Calvin's liturgical form bears similarity to Luther's liturgical form in that the preaching of the Word is strongly emphasized, and listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit through the message (Thompson, *Calvin*, 185-196; Wengert 27-38). The picture emerging of early Calvinist worship is one that combines an Eastern mysticism with a strong appeal to Scripture. It is set in a simple and plain congregational context that is made to resemble the Kingdom of God in heaven and the early church (O'Malley, *The Church as the Re-creation of Divine Order*; Dix 632-635).

The Presbyterian Descendants of Calvin:

Arguably many types of Calvinists are in the world today, and many groups have adopted Calvin's Eucharistic theology. For the sake of time, I wish to narrow in on the Presbyterian descendants of Calvin because their Eucharistic liturgy represents the common type that the spiritual seeker will encounter in the United States today. When King Edward VI died in 1553, Mary I, brought England back to Roman Catholicism. This sent many Protestants in England into exile. One such exile was John Knox, who arrived in Geneva, Switzerland in 1556 to study with John Calvin. An English-speaking congregation under the leadership of Knox lasted for four years in Geneva before immigrating back to Elizabethan England. In England, Knox, was met with a lukewarm reception by Puritan Calvinists, so he moved to Scotland to form a national church based off the Genevan model (Thompson, *Knox*, 287-294).

While in Geneva, Knox created a liturgy with a lengthy confession of sins. This confession preserved Calvin's original entreating for the presence of the Holy Spirit, and for

God's mercy. Knox also preserved Calvin's understanding of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Knox uses the terminology that the congregation is really eating Christ. Knox, like Calvin, also ascribes a purpose of the Eucharist as remembering the death of Christ, *anamnesis*. By remembering the death of Christ, the church serves its function to be God's Kingdom on earth (Knox 295-303). However, in the totality of his thought, Knox goes beyond a memorial understanding of the Eucharist. Knox brings his liturgy back to Scotland for what will become the Presbyterian Church there (Thompson, *Knox*, 287-294).

The Eucharist in Presbyterianism Today:

In 1984, Presbyterianism in America was assessed to see how closely it approximated the Eucharistic understanding of John Calvin and John Knox. The strong Calvinistic theme of the real presence of Christ was found. A confession centering on the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, and pleading for the grace of God was affirmed. There was also an understanding of remembering the death of Christ, *anamnesis*. The researcher, George W. Strop III, also found that Presbyterians associated the Eucharist with Christ's passion for the poor (Strop 23-31).

Several things need to be said about worshiping in a Presbyterian congregation. Historically Presbyterian congregations practice closed communion. Only Baptized Christians can take communion because only those who are Baptized are obedient to Christ. Calvin wanted to make sure that Baptized children understood salvation by grace before participating in the work of the body of Christ, the church (Thompson, *Calvin*, 185-196). Order is stressed in Calvinist congregations because Eucharistic practice is an act bringing God's Kingdom to earth (O'Malley, *The Church as the Re-creation of Divine Order*). If you are a seeker, but you are not Baptized, it would be most appropriate to abstain from communion.

Questions for Sincere Seekers:

It may be helpful to answer these questions when worshipping in a Presbyterian setting.

- Do I wish to confess my sins to God silently? Am I repentant?
- Do I wish to ask the Holy Spirit to guide my life? Am I willing to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit through preaching?
- Do I believe that Christ is really present in the bread and the wine?
- Do I believe that Holy Spirit transports believers to heaven to commune with the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit? Or do I believe that Christ is present with the bread and wine as the Word?
- How might worshipping in the presence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit encourage my faith and my love for the Lord?
- How do I wish to worship in the presence of the Lord? Does it involve meditation using iconography and incense, or does it involve worship with Scripture reading and hymns?
- How important is it to me to worship in a congregation that places a high priority on being God's Kingdom on earth?

Final Thoughts:

The above account does not pretend to be an extensive guide for the spiritual seeker. It has not covered many vital Eucharistic traditions in which the Holy Spirit can be felt, and in which the believer can be transported to heaven to commune with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. However, asking and answering the above questions in these settings may help the spiritual seeker begin the process of finding where they feel closest to God, and finding the place where they can grow the most as a Christian. It is a beginning guide to becoming one with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For deeper investigation see the resources listed in the Works Cited page.

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