

FOREWORD

THIS BOOK is an essay in “liturgical theology”. It is in fact a study in biblical theology which seeks to provide a firm basis for the eucharistic liturgy in the great Judaeo-Christian tradition represented by the Scriptures. But, if the Christian liturgy is based upon biblical theology, it does illuminate, in its turn, certain aspects of the Scriptures, since it is nothing else than the Word of the Father and of the Son, heard, sung and prayed in the Holy Spirit by the Church. The relation between the Bible and the liturgy, the constant transition from one to the other, provides the Church with inexhaustible themes for meditation and leads the faithful to a faith nourished by contemplation. This is the explanation of my method, which consists in an alternation between biblical study and liturgical practice, so that the interplay of Bible and liturgy may encourage meditation on particular themes and a practical spirituality may be developed by basing the liturgy on the Bible. I also see in this alternation a pedagogical value, in the integration of theological thought with liturgical reflexion.

The Fathers of the Church followed this same procedure and the cream of their theology is to be found in their liturgical catecheses, in their homilies delivered during the mysteries. This conception of theology, intimately united with the liturgical life, avoids that intellectualism that always threatens a too rational science of exegesis, history and dogma. This reference to the Church’s worship is necessary for theology in order that it may remain conscious of its object: the reality of God. Theology encounters the living God in the Word, the Sacrament and the prayers that constitute the Church’s liturgy. In this confrontation with the liturgy, theology is constantly recalled to its pastoral responsibility; it avoids more easily the rash hypotheses that endanger faith and is more fully committed to the search for the truth, so as to build up the Church in unity and mould the faith of believers into true devotion. This concern for the faith has led me to seek to express myself as simply as possible, without jettisoning the solid and necessary basis of research, and to provide a transliteration of Hebrew terms.

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This study of the memorial of the Lord is intended to awaken the enthusiasm of the faithful for the Lord's Supper and its traditional liturgy. Too frequently the Eucharist has been the subject of polemics and disunity. Too often the real presence has been studied in isolation, with more concern to determine the mode of that presence than to wonder at the very fact that Christ is there, with His body and blood, to include us in His sacrifice and in His intercession. That is why I wish to study the dynamic aspect of the liturgical action in order to find in it the real presence of Christ not as a theological problem but as a normal and necessary fact, postulated by the eucharistic action itself, which is a memorial of thanksgiving and intercession, of communion with the unique sacrifice and with the perpetual intercession of the Son before the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit.

Because the Son has offered once for all a perfect sacrifice and because He presents it perpetually to the Father in intercession, the Church, in the power and communion of the Holy Spirit, can offer, in Christ, the thanksgiving and intercession of the Eucharist, and in it find the cross and its blessings and associate itself with the heavenly intercession of the Son, and receive, according to His promise and the simplicity of its faith, the body and blood of the Saviour, which is the food of eternal life and the power necessary for a true and universal charity.