

## CAPTURING TRUTH IN SYMBOL

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### Summary:

This paper is a discussion around the importance of symbol and its relationship to truth. The focus is largely around the Emergent church. Included as an appendix is an Emergent Eucharistic Liturgy for a Modern (Non-Sacramental) Evangelical Fellowship.

Length: 24 pages

A golden wedding band. A red maple leaf bordered by red panels. A Nike swoosh. A cute baby seal. Our lives are surrounded by symbols--things that, at a glance, will bring to mind a whole host of thoughts and feelings. Feelings that cannot be easily expressed, or even defined are contained within the symbol and our reaction to it.

Religious or spiritual symbols are perhaps unique in a sense, for they can encompass a concept that defies definition in language or even in human understanding. Just as the symbol “ $\infty$ ” means infinity in mathematics, even those of us that would be able to answer correctly in a trivia game, would likely be unable to truly know and understand the idea of infinity. A symbol captures far more truth than any one person will draw from it. Throughout Christian history symbols have been used to draw man to God and God to man. The Emergent Church has a desire to return to many of the historical traditions of the Church, as well as forging new ground. A renewed use of symbol has accompanied this. The use of symbol, coupled with a return to the celebration of the Mystery of God, affects the manner in which the Postmodern generation grapples with the idea of truth.

Humanity has always been drawn to symbolism, whether it be the Native Canadian pictographs, Egyptian hieroglyphics, or Early Christian drawings found on the walls of the Catacombs. People have always ventured to express their spiritual musings in a symbolic manner. While we think of symbols as being largely visual, music for example, can be a huge stimulus to bring to mind feelings and thoughts that may otherwise be left unexamined. Everyone has a song in their past that, upon hearing, can take them right back to that moment in their history when they first identified with it. That song has become a powerful symbol for them, often even against their desire for it to be so. A random hearing of the song will, almost without rational logic, bring them to joy or to tears, depending on its original setting.

Why do symbols play such a large role in the lives of people? Simply said, a symbol is something that stands for something else.<sup>1</sup> Symbols express concepts that language alone cannot. In the case of spiritual concepts, we can understand and accept a symbol of these concepts, even though a full understanding of the mystical concept is unlikely. Also, sometimes language may cause conflict, if there is a disagreement over interpretation. Use of a symbol allows all people to use their own interpretation without the constraint and difficulty of language. Symbols have the power to touch us at a deep level. Often this is at a level beyond the realm of “rationality”. We may not be able to explain our reaction, but we are often profoundly touched by symbols.<sup>2</sup> Travelers are often surprised by their latent patriotism when encountering a Canadian flag in their foreign travels.

In Protestant Evangelical Christianity, we have tended to avoid ritual and symbolism for fear of legalism. Our Protestant roots have shown us the dangers of ritual gone awry. Spiritual awakening can get sidetracked into disappointment. “Christianity can degenerate into sacramental or formalism when sacraments become ends in themselves rather than means of grace. But Christian faith can just as easily degenerate into Creedalism and Moralism when only belief and ethics are stressed.”<sup>3</sup>

Edward Farley refers to Deep Symbols as “...the values by which a community understands itself, from which it takes its aims, and to which it appeals as canons of cultural criticism. To grow up in a community is to have one’s consciousness shaped by these symbols.”<sup>4</sup> He goes on to say that deep symbols express the historical determinacy of a

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<sup>1</sup> *The New Merriam-Webster Pocket Dictionary* (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1971), 497.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Taylor, *How to Read a Church: A Guide to Symbols and Images in Churches and Cathedrals* (Mahwah, NJ: HiddenSpring, 2003), 3.

<sup>3</sup> A.H. Mathias Zahniser, *Symbol and Ceremony: Making Disciples Across Culture* (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1997), 7

<sup>4</sup> Edward Farley, *Deep Symbols: Their Postmodern Effacement and Reclamation* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 3.

community. Since they are historical, they are relative to a specific situation and community and are able to be changed. “They can rise and empower and they can lose their power and disappear.”<sup>5</sup>

Victor Turner, a Scottish anthropologist, speaks of his experience with cultural ritual.

I learned from the Ndembu that ritual and its symbolism are not merely epiphenomena (spin-offs) or disguises of deeper social and psychological processes, but have ontological value (I.e. they say something about reality itself) ... I have become convinced that religion is ... really at the heart of the human matter. Deciphering ritual forms and discovering what generates symbolic actions may be more germane to our cultural growth than we have supposed. But we have to put ourselves in some way inside religious processes to obtain knowledge of them. There must be a conversion experience.<sup>6</sup>

We must view the symbol from the inside. For Turner, he was awakened to spirituality by becoming a “participant observer” in the ritualistic and symbolic life of the community he desired to get to know. This same situation happens over and over in the Emergent Church. People are drawn to the community of believers because of the positive qualities they see, whatever a particular person is “impressed” by, whether it be humility, vitality, worship of God, altruism. As the person becomes involved in the ritual and symbolic life of the Faith Gathering, they are drawn to the truth that has been captured in that symbol. Often times a person would not have encountered that truth had the symbol not represented some aspect of the truth for them.

How do symbols do this? “Even the plainest symbols...are magic portals into the other world where the truth of ones religion is visible, felt, and far overshadows the inconsistent ordinary”.<sup>7</sup> In a cross-cultural setting symbols can be used without being seen as magical. So while symbols are called “magic portals”, care must be taken to not use symbols manipulatively.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Victor Turner quoted in Zahniser, *Symbol and Ceremony*, 73.

<sup>7</sup> Robert S. Ellwood quoted in Zahniser, *Symbol and Ceremony*, 74.

“Symbols--authentic symbols--connect believers with God’s gracious involvement in their lives. Symbols must not be a substitute for Divine involvement.”<sup>8</sup>

If symbols from a particular culture are used, and those symbols already have a meaning attached to them, a fear of syncretism arises. Throughout history, the Christian Church has had a fear of combining Christianity with “pagan” religion. The result has often been an attempt to instill Western Christian culture into the community rather than to bring an understanding of the love of God the Father. A similar cross-cultural situation exists as the Modern Evangelical Church and the Postmodern Emergent Church encounter one another. The Emergent Church is embarking on uncharted waters, and need to ensure that the Gospel is not distorted by bonding with the wrong cultural meaning.<sup>9</sup> The close affiliation of the Arts community with the New Age community cannot be ignored, as the Emergent Church and its connection to the Arts community is strengthened. Similarly, the Emergent Church must be mindful of the pitfalls of the Middle Ages Roman Catholic Church concerning ritual and sacrament. For some, it may become a short step from sacrament to magic, rather than viewing sacrament as a means of God’s grace.

The words of postmodern writer Donald Miller echo the view of many in the Emergent Church.

I think part of my problem is that I want spirituality to be more close and more real. I understand why people wear crystals around their necks and why they perform chants and gaze at stars. They are lonely. I’m not talking about lonely for a lover or friend. I mean lonely in the universal sense, lonely inside the understanding that we are tiny little people on a tiny little earth suspended in an endless void that echoes past stars and stars of stars. And it’s not like God has a call-in radio show.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Zahniser, *Symbol and Ceremony*, 76.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>10</sup> Donald Miller, *Blue Like Jazz: Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 92.

For many, the use of symbol, be it tangible or ceremonial, is that call-in radio to God. It's a connection.

All Christians attach importance to symbols, whether they acknowledge it as such.

Whether it is a matter of lowering one's voice in the building where the church meets, or of refusing to use make-up, or of wearing or not wearing a crucifix, or of kneeling, or bowing one's head ... at the holy name, ... all Christian piety and worship is shot through with the symbolism of either gesture or objects or both. We see the unseen in the seen. The surface of things speaks what lies beneath. Our postures, our dress, our gestures, and the artifacts with which we surround ourselves--the very way we bind and gild our Bibles--all cry out that we are creatures whose approach to the Most High, since it cannot be direct like the seraphim's, must be set about and assisted with symbols.<sup>11</sup>

There are two equal dangers regarding symbols. Firstly, there is a danger in their overuse, in the sense that they may become magical or even become objects of worship themselves. But a second and equal danger lies in seeing symbols in a negative light, and therefore stop their use, and eventually think there is no supernatural, and the present world is all there is.

I like the term "amphibian" when used to describe man. W. Norman Pittenger quotes Evelyn Underhill.<sup>12</sup> We inhabit two distinct environments. We are a physical body, but we are also a spiritual soul. There is a distinctive interplay between the two. Thoughtful writers from Aristotle to St. Thomas Aquinas to William James attest to this. Quoting Romano Guardini, Pittenger writes on taking the sign of the Cross,

It embraces your whole being, body and soul, your thoughts and you will, imagination and feeling, doing and resting; and in it all will be strengthened, stamped and consecrated in the power of Christ, the name of the Holy Trinity. In fact the whole body is the tool and expression of the soul. The soul does not merely dwell in the body, as if it dwelt in a house, but it lives and works in every member and every fibre. It speaks in every line, and form, and movement of the body.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas Howard, *Evangelical is Not Enough: Worship of God in Liturgy and Sacrament* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1984), 23.

<sup>12</sup> W. Norman Pittenger, *Sacraments, Signs and Symbols* (Chicago, IL: Wilcox & Follett Co., 1949), 13.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

The two-fold “job” of symbols--both drawing people to God and reminding people of the truths of God that they know--need not lie in tension with one another. Do I wear a Cross pendant as a witness to others of my Christianity? Yes. Do I wear a Cross pendant to be an ever-present reminder of God’s sacrifice and love for me? Yes. Both can be true. Did God command Abraham to circumcise the Hebrew men as a sign of being his people and being “different” than men of other nations? Yes. Did God choose a “sign” such as circumcision as an ever-present, personal and private daily reminder to Hebrew men that they are in a covenant relationship with the God of the universe? Yes.

Christian symbols have been prevalent throughout Church History. Though Early Christians, coming from an “no graven images” Jewish heritage, tended to not embrace art and symbols to the extent of later periods, they had many symbols that were used and understood by the believers. Each symbol captured, in some way, the truth that the followers of The Way desired to know and remember.


One could separate Early Christian art into three broad categories--based on content, as function is not as clear-cut to categorize.<sup>14</sup> The first grouping would be those derived from classical or pagan sources and adapted to the Christian faith. These tend to be the earliest images and symbols used. A second category would be considered as more religiously neutral and perhaps even decorative, but are still understood to have particular Christian symbolic significance. Symbols of fish, doves, and anchors would fall into this category. A final category would contain narrative based themes drawn from biblical stories--from both Old and New Testaments. These are not to be considered mere illustrations, as the reoccurrence of certain themes and groupings showed them as symbolic and liturgical, rather than mere instructions for the non-reader.

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<sup>14</sup> Robin Margaret Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 17.

When considering the function of the symbols in the Early Church, the divisions are not so easy to make. For example, the fish symbol became a popular symbol in the Early Church and has in fact seen a resurgence in modern Evangelical circles. The Greek word for fish, *ichthys*, can be read as acronym for *Iesous Christos Theou Huios Soter* (Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour). Some believe that the early Christians adopted this as a secret symbol to identify one another without drawing more persecution to themselves.<sup>15</sup>

In the Early Church, the symbol of the Good Shepherd was a much more common way to portray Jesus than, for example, Crucified Lord or Regal King. From our theological viewpoint in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we can see how the Early Church would be drawn more to a Good Shepherd who cares for them, than a Regal King that does not offer power and interference in their daily persecutions.

The symbol of the Cross was not used by early Christians, who preferred the anchor or the Chi Rho as a symbol of their hope and belief in Jesus. The Chi Rho is a sacred monogram using the XP from the Greek word for Christ. (XPICTOC). The X can be used artistically as a reminder of the Cross. The P is imposed on the X to make a single symbol. (  ) As a symbol, the Chi Rho predates Christianity, but received great significance when Constantine adopted it after his vision, where Jesus appeared to him and told him to use it as his military standard.

The image of Jesus as Lamb of God (*Agnus Dei*) was also popular among early Christians. Taken from John's writings (I.e. John 1:29), the symbol of purity, meekness, and suffering sacrifice was a prominent theological theme of the Early Church.

Important symbolic themes of the Middle Ages, and perhaps the Modern Roman Catholic Church, would centre on Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross. The crucifix would be an easily

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<sup>15</sup> Taylor, *How to Read a Church*, 52.



identifiable Catholic symbol for the non-Christian, and a symbol full of meaning to a Catholic believer. The sacrament of the Eucharist, and the Holy Mass also contain the great truth of God's sacrifice for mankind. The Stations of the Cross (the Via Crucis) are a symbolic narrative of the events, understood in real not mystical time, when the Saviour made His way to a sacrificial death. The Christian is able to perform his own pilgrimage as he stops at each station and prays and meditates on Jesus' suffering. At each station, the truth of the symbol is powerfully received as the pilgrim focuses his thoughts.

The amazing architecture of the cathedrals of the Middle Ages are full of awe-inspiring symbolism--a symbolism which portrays the truth of God come to man, and man's response of worship, as the truth of the incarnation is encountered.

The Modern Evangelical Church, which is often considered to be non-symbolic, or at least less symbolic, indeed has many symbols which capture the truth of Modern Evangelical theology. The centrality of Scripture is perhaps the first symbol, both in the pulpit where the preaching of the Word happens, and in the open gilded Bible on the communion table, or the banners containing pertinent scripture passages.

The dove or the flames of fire that symbolize the Holy Spirit are symbols that, to someone outside the community, may appear to be a bird of peace, for example. In fact it's a visual reminder of God's power and His close presence to His followers.

Another interesting symbol of the Modern Evangelical Church in which I was raised is the "altar call" or "conversion decision". Brian McLaren talks of this "event-oriented" conversion of his early years as a Christian.<sup>16</sup> The "accepting-Jesus-as-your-personal-Saviour" symbol is very powerful in the Modern Church. There is much truth captured in the event of

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<sup>16</sup> Brian D. McLaren, *More Ready Than You Realize: Evangelism as Dance in the Postmodern Matrix* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 103.

conversion. The symbol of having a conversion point is, as many old-time preachers will say, very helpful to go back to when you are struggling and wondering if this Christianity thing is for real. But the postmodern person may not be able to, or even want to, see a point where “I am now a Believer”. The process is more blurred, with more shades of grey than a specific “decision” can address.

Even the idea of Salvation will be approached differently in the Emergent Church.

Salvation, as normally understood outside the context of the whole story (say-a-prayer-so-that-when-you-die-you-can-go-to-heaven), lacks the power to be compelling. The reductionist version was never right or true. Lacking the context of the story of God and his Kingdom, salvation became, in late modernity, just another consumer item that supposedly secured one’s eternity.<sup>17</sup>

In the Emergent Church, the renewed use of art will increase, as well as change, the use of symbol. “It is important to remember that the world of symbols is not fixed.”<sup>18</sup> There have been generally accepted meanings for symbols, but these meanings can change. In addition, there will be new symbols and the blending of symbols. The Emergent Church has adopted many of the Eucharistic symbolism, and the truth contained in them. The Modern Church favoured to remove “some” of the symbolism of the Eucharist, when communion came to be celebrated as a remembrance, rather than a sacrament. Much of the sacramental symbolism of the Eucharist is being reclaimed by the Emergent Church. The centrality of a physical table, a chalice, and the aesthetic experience of the Eucharist are all prevalent symbols in the Emergent Church.

The desire of the Emergent Church to create a sacred space in which to worship has led to much innovation. Transforming an ordinary, secular space into a sacred place of worship, provides an important symbol. The need for setting aside our ordinary life, and regular daily

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<sup>17</sup> Mike Yaconelli, ed., *Stories of Emergence: Moving From Absolute to Authentic* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 49.

<sup>18</sup> Taylor, *How to Read a Church*, 4.

experience, for a sacred experience, is a profound truth that can be captured in the symbol of sacred space.

It is an essential condition of any traditional religious service that the space in which it is conducted must be invested with some measure of sacrality.... If an audience is not immersed in an aura of mystery and symbolic otherworldliness, then it is unlikely that it can call forth the state of mind required for a nontrivial religious experience.<sup>19</sup>

While the truth of sacred space is recognized, we must not allow this symbol to remove the mystery of God and place him in a box where we determine where and when he can encounter us.

If symbols are to be seen as a portal to the heavenly, and if, in fact, we are capturing a mere part of the Truth of God, a discussion of truth is needed to determine what we mean. Modern Evangelicals will have a different perception of what is meant by truth than a Postmodern believer, or from an Early Christian believer, as well.

The concept of truth is addressed throughout Scripture. In the Psalms there are many references to truth. As an example, Psalm 25:5, or Psalm 86:11. Jesus spoke many, many times in the gospels with the preface, "I tell you the truth...." He says he is the Truth. (John 14:6) In John 8:31-32, Jesus says the truth will set us free and if we hold to his teachings, we will be his disciple, and then we will know the truth. This theme of truth runs through John's gospel, as well as throughout Paul's letters. As an example, Romans 1:25, Galatians 2:5, Titus 1:1. Scripture has a lot to say about Truth.

The Modern Evangelical Church believes that the Revelation of God through his Word, the Scriptures, is the Truth on which we are to base our lives. When we are told in 1 Peter 3:15 to be ready to give an answer for the hope that is in us in Christ, we are to give a "reasoned" answer, one that contains the truth. This connection of reason and truth, has come to mean that if

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<sup>19</sup> Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 133.

one can understand and make a reasonable sense of something, it is truth. Unfortunately, the converse has also come to be identified with Modern thought. That is, if it is not reasonable, it is not true.

The Emergent Church has a much different perspective on truth--a perspective that colours their approach to symbols. For the postmodern thinker, truth is not the same as knowledge, or the same as belief and faith. All are involved in an interplay, in that as we grow in faith and knowledge, we are encountering more of God's truth, and thus are able to "know" more of God's truth. As we experience God's truth, we are then able to know more truth than perhaps we would have been unable to recognize at an earlier time. That is not the same as saying, "This is the truth and I now know it, and will live in it". Brian McLaren sees it this way.

... In postmodern times, it's dangerous to use the word "truth" naively. As never before, we are sensitive to how hard it is (some would say impossible) to know truth. We are increasingly aware of the ways our presuppositions and subjectivity color our perception, interpretation, understanding, and communication of "the truth"--and as a result, we aren't at all sure if what we have at the end of the day is even worth calling "truth."<sup>20</sup>

The postmodern thinker has given much attention to the limitations of the language of certainty used by Modern religious people. These limitations make it impossible to even say we know anything in any absolute sense. "Postmodernity is definitely redefining truth, but so what? Culture has redefined truth for thousands of years, yet the truth of God can still penetrate any culture."<sup>21</sup> It really comes down to that. God must be bigger than our concept or understanding of him. "Whatever you do anyway, remember that these things are mysteries and that if they were such that we could understand them, they wouldn't be worth understanding. A

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<sup>20</sup> Brian D. McLaren, *Finding Faith: A Self-Discovery Guide for Your Spiritual Quest* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 51.

<sup>21</sup> John Burke, *No Perfect People Allowed: Creating a Come As You Are Culture in the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 169.

God you understood would be less than yourself.”<sup>22</sup> At a deep level we all know this, even Modern Evangelical Christians. We must make our Christian language and apologetics match this deep knowledge.

Several Emergent leaders speak of the importance of processing truth in community. “Truth, we must remember, belongs to God alone. As people are restored into right relationship with the Truth, then by his Spirit he guides people into all truth just as he promised.”<sup>23</sup> If God alone is truth, as a community of faith gathers, the truth God has promised to his church, will develop and grow his followers as they seek after his truth. (Ephesians 4:11-16)

Brad Cecil speaks of the difficulty for many Christians with regard to this understanding of truth, because so much of our theology and models of spiritual formation are based on the Modern concept of an Absolute Truth.<sup>24</sup> Once we figure this truth out, we will be right with God. Besides being the proverbial elusive butterfly that is always just out of reach, this attitude places the onus on the believer and takes it away from God, who is the giver of truth. This only reinforces the modern viewpoint of Man as the centre. Cecil goes on to say that community equals truth and spiritual formation must take place in community, and in a community that does not only relate in a didactic mode, where information is dispersed. “This new understanding of truth means that you cannot obtain truth if you aren’t participating in community.”<sup>25</sup>

For the Emergent Church, if community is where one obtains truth, then it is easy to see why participatory liturgy is so integral. As a community of faith gathers and participates in worship together throughout the gathering, they are being more than a mere receiver of information, as often happens in Modern Evangelical services.

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<sup>22</sup> Flannery O’Connor quoted in McLaren, *Finding Faith*, 60.

<sup>23</sup> Burke, *No Perfect People Allowed*, 182.

<sup>24</sup> Yaconelli, *Stories of Emergence*, 175.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

A final look at capturing truth in symbol should address the renewed concept of sacrament in the Emergent Church. While a huge topic in Christian theology, the sacraments in this context are viewed as a symbol of a great truth--albeit a truth that is not fully understood. Therefore, a treatise of whether or not Christ is physically present in the Eucharist bread and wine, or does Baptism save us from our sins, is a discussion for a different time. The Emergent Church has realized the importance of returning to the truth that God's grace is given to us through these symbols.

While there are many differing definitions offered for the term "sacrament", a term not even used in scripture, the real issue is one of worldview.<sup>26</sup> How a person views the dichotomies of life--physical and spiritual, faith and works, man's action and God's action--will by and large determine their concept of sacrament. Vander Zee speaks of the great sacramental divide where the rivers of Christian interpretation flow one way or the other.

The real divide is between those who hold sacraments to be mere signs and nothing more, and those who hold them to be signs *and* seals that bear and confirm God's grace. Another way of stating the division is that on the one side the "ordinances" as they are often called, are means of *expressing faith to God*, and on the other side, sacraments are a means of *receiving grace from God*.<sup>27</sup>

Again, both terms, ordinances and sacraments, have a large amount of historical and theological baggage that they carry with them. The Postmodern church, in its desire to redeem and renew the concept of sacrament, may mean something different from either term, or may have a meaning that blends the two.

That the sacraments are a "means of grace", the term used by the church of my youth, is a concept not foreign to the Modern Evangelical Church. Unfortunately, its full meaning is often lost when communion is done as a "remembrance" of Christ's sacrifice. As with other symbols,

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<sup>26</sup> Leonard J. Vander Zee, *Christ, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper: Recovering the Sacraments*, (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 27.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

communion--the Eucharist-- has the ability to become a ritual and to have claims attached to it that are perhaps not part of God's truth. It is true of all symbols, that the truth gleaned from the symbol is dependent on what knowledge and experience the perceiver brings to the symbol. Even the question, "How do the sacraments work?" indicates a thoroughly Modern mindset. While the Modern mind wants to dissect concepts and delve back to the foundations, in order to build a reasoned answer, the Postmodern person is dissatisfied with the resulting answer if it doesn't make sense in their experience. "As might be expected. Sacraments operate in a manner that we can't disassemble and put back together. They operate at the very boundaries of our understanding."<sup>28</sup>

God, in all his mystery, will meet with us in the Eucharist. The importance of community, as we receive God's mysterious truth cannot be overemphasized, for without accountability and the combined experiences of the gathered community, the Eucharist--the remembrance of, and thanksgiving for, Christ's broken body--will not invoke its full impact. Part of the mystery of God's divine presence in the elements, is achieved through the gathering of his people.

Symbols capture truth in a way that acknowledges our finite ability to know all the mysteries of God. Symbols are accepted as the representation of the truth they point to. They are not a full representation, but a particular angle, from a limited viewpoint. When we accept this, then we know, at a deep level, that we are only accessing a portion of God's truth for us. We must continue searching and seeking. (Matthew 18:20)

"Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known." (1 Corinthians 13:13)

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 53.

## Appendix

### An Emergent Eucharistic Liturgy for a Modern (Non-Sacramental) Evangelical Fellowship<sup>i</sup>

*Come, Let us sing for joy to the Lord;  
Let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.  
Let us come before him with thanksgiving  
And extol him with music and song.  
For the Lord is the great God,  
The great King above all gods.*

*Come let us bow down in worship,  
Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker;  
For he is our God,  
And we are the people of his pasture...  
(Psalm 95:1-3, 6-7)*

#### **Call to Worship**

We come together as a community of faith to worship a Holy God. God has done a great work in our lives, both individually, and in our community when we gather together. As we celebrate this Holy Eucharist<sup>ii</sup> -- what St. Augustine called "the visible form of the invisible grace given us by God"-- may we remember that this is, in fact, a Holy moment.

#### **Song : Holy Moment (M Redman)<sup>iii</sup>**

As we come today, we remind ourselves of what we do.  
That these songs are not just songs, but signs of love for You.  
This is a holy moment now, something of heaven touches earth  
Voices of angels all resound- we join their song.

Come, come, come let us worship God  
With our hands held high and our hearts bowed down.  
We will run, run, run through Your gates, O God  
With a shout of love, with a shout of love.

Lord, with confidence we come before Your Throne of Grace.  
Not that we deserve to come, but You have paid the way.  
You are the Holy King of all, heaven and earth are in Your hands.



All of the angels sing your song- we join them now.

Let this be a holy moment now  
Let this be a holy moment now.

The Holy Eucharist, or communion that we celebrate is a work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God comes to us with his grace and because of his offering of grace, we are fully able to remember, and know in our hearts, the sacrifice made for us by our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. We express our faith **to** God and receive grace **from** God. Each are needed.

We are both spiritual and physical people and God meets us in our physical body with the physical elements of this bread and this wine. Sacraments, perhaps a term unfamiliar to our ears, are, in fact, God's body language to us, <sup>iv</sup> his creatures, who live in a physical world. Just as with the other times, when we refer to "body language" as showing a person's true intent, maybe even contradicting a visual or oral language, this "body language" of God shows his true intention for us. This sacrament, is joined with the revelation of God that we have received by his Word, and this union not only explains his love for us, but confirms it.

The Word tells us to examine our hearts as we prepare for communion. In 1 Corinthians 11:28-29, Paul reminds us we are experiencing a Holy Moment, and what our response should be:

*Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. (1 Corinthians 11:28-29)*

Does this mean only perfect, sinless saints of God are the intended recipients of this grace of God? Certainly not, for we do not partake of this communion because we are holy and pious, we partake because we are Followers of Jesus, often riddled by doubt and anxiety and anger, nearly fainting from, what Nancy Mairs<sup>v</sup> calls, "severe hypoglycaemia of the soul". We need this connection with God to feed our souls as we strive, together as a community of Faith, to be Followers of Jesus.

The Holy Word of God tells us:

*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.  
(Romans 8:35, 37-39)*

Let us draw near to our Lord and Saviour as we sing, with our hearts and our voices, of his redeeming sacrifice for us. <sup>vi</sup>

**Song : Once Again (M. Redman)**

Jesus Christ, I think upon Your sacrifice  
You became nothing, poured out to death  
Many times I've wondered at your gift of life  
I'm in that place once again  
I'm in that place once again

And once again I look upon the cross where You died  
I'm humbled by Your mercy and I'm broken inside  
Once again I thank You  
Once again I pour out my life.

Now You are exalted to the highest place  
King of the heavens, where one day I'll bow  
But for now, I marvel at this saving grace  
I'm full of praise once again  
I'm full of praise once again

Thank you for the cross  
Thank you for the cross  
Thank you for the cross, my Friend

**Song: How Deep the Father's Love for Me (S. Townsend)**

How deep the Father's love for us  
How vast beyond all measure.  
That He should give His only Son  
To make a wretch His treasure.  
How great the pain of searing loss  
The Father turns His face away  
As wounds which mar the Chosen One  
Bring many sons to glory.

Behold the man upon a cross  
My sin upon His shoulders  
Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice  
Call out among the scoffers  
It was my sin that held Him there  
Until it was accomplished

His dying breath has brought me life  
I know that it is finished

I will not boast in anything  
No gifts, no power, no wisdom  
But I will boast in Jesus Christ  
His death and resurrection  
Why should I gain from His reward?  
I cannot give an answer  
But this I know with all my heart  
His wounds have paid my ransom

**Song: Cleanse Me (J. Edwin Orr)**

Search me, O God and know my heart today  
Try me O Saviour, know my thoughts, I pray  
See if there be some wicked way in me;  
Cleanse me from every sin and set me free

I praise thee, Lord, for cleansing me from sin  
Fulfill thy word and make me pure within  
Fill me with fire where once I burned with shame;  
Grant my desire to magnify Thy Name

**Liturgy of Communion:<sup>vii</sup>**

(Leader stands behind the Communion Table and says)<sup>viii</sup>

**Leader:** The Lord be with you.

**People:** And also with you.

**Leader:** Lift up your hearts.

**People:** We lift them up to the Lord.

**Leader:** Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**People:** It is right to give our thanks and praise.

**Leader:** It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth. You formed us in your image and breathed into us the breath of life. When we turned away, and our love failed, your love remained steadfast. You

delivered us from captivity , made covenant to be our sovereign God, and spoke to us through your prophets. And so, with your people on earth, and all the company of heaven we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

**People:** Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth, are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

**Leader:** Holy are you, and blessed is your Son Jesus Christ. Your Spirit anointed him to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, and to announce that the time had come when you would save your people.

**Leader:** When the Lord Jesus ascended, He promised to be with us always, in the power of Your Word and Holy Spirit.

**Leader:** On the night in which He gave Himself up for us, He took bread, gave thanks to You, broke the bread, gave it to His disciples, and said: “Take, eat; this is My body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.”

**Leader:** When the supper was over, He took the cup, gave thanks to You, gave it to His disciples, and said: “Drink from this, all of you; This is My blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.”

So come<sup>ix</sup> to the Table to receive this new covenant. As we come, let us remember that we **receive** communion, not **take** communion, for it is God who is offering His grace to us. All we must do, to experience this wonderful mystery of God, is to come, accept and receive.

**Songs:** *As the People gather  
to the Table or to the altar, as desired,  
to receive the elements and then return to their seats.*

**Let Us Break Bread Together  
Surrender (M. James)  
Refiner’s Fire (B. Doerksen)**

**Leader:** And so, in remembrance of these Your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ’s offering for us, as we proclaim the mystery of faith.

**People:** Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.

**Leader:** Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, who have received these gifts of bread and wine. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the Body of Christ, redeemed by His blood.

By Your Spirit, make us one with Christ, and one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world.

**People:** Amen.

**Leader:** And now, with the confidence of children of God, let us pray;

**All:** Our Father Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name  
Thy Kingdom come, Thy Will be done,  
On earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day, our daily bread.  
Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.  
Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.  
For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory  
Forever and ever, Amen

Let us join together in song as we offer our thanks, and our love, to God.

**Song of Response; I Will Offer Up My Life (M. Redman)**

I will offer up my life  
In spirit and truth  
Pouring out the oil of love  
As my worship to You  
In surrender I must give my every part  
Lord, receive the sacrifice  
Of a broken heart

Jesus, what can I give, what can I bring  
To so faithful a Friend, to so loving a King?  
Saviour, what can be said, what can be sung  
As a praise of Your name  
For the things You have done?  
Oh, my words could not tell, not even in part  
Of the debt of love that is owed by this thankful heart

You deserve my every breath  
For You've paid the great cost  
Giving up Your life to death  
Even death on a cross

You took all my shame away  
There defeated my sin  
Opened up the gates of heaven  
And have beckoned me in

**Leader:** As you depart this place and go into the world, remember to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength; and to love your neighbour as yourself. And as the Apostle Paul reminds us:

*And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the Name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him (Colossians 3:17).*

**Leader:** We depart in faith.

**People:** Trusting God to guide us through this week.

**Leader:** We depart in hope.

**People:** Knowing God holds the future in his hands.

**Leader:** We depart in love.

**People:** Serving others in the name of Christ.

**Leader:** We depart in faith, in hope, and in love.

**People:** Thanks be to God! Amen.

**Song of dismissal:  
“I will Offer up my life” as an instrumental”**

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<sup>i</sup> The “Modern” Church that I am choosing is the church of my Youth. It is a Church of the Nazarene, with a large percentage of 40-50 year olds, and a large group of teens. The congregation averages about 75. It is non-liturgical, but is quite familiar with the “responsive readings” format as part of the service. It would be non-sacramental in its theology, but accepts the concept of “means of Grace”, although does not use the terms ordinance or sacrament.

<sup>ii</sup> I believe the term “Eucharist” will be accepted if it is explained in concepts that are understandable. They commonly used term would be “Communion“, or “The Lord’s Supper”.

<sup>iii</sup> Unsure whether it is necessary to provide publishing details for songs.



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<sup>iv</sup> Taken from Leonard J. Vander Zee. *Christ, Baptism and the Lord's Supper: Recovering the Sacraments*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2004.

<sup>v</sup> as quoted in Vander Zee, 68.

<sup>vi</sup> “Congregational singing” is an important way to learn in my church. The lyrics of a song are always very important. In an Emergent setting, this would be seen as part of the participatory liturgy.

<sup>vii</sup> While the term “liturgy” would be unfamiliar in this Modern church, I think the benefit of comfort and of tradition in using the same “service” with each Lord’s Supper, would be welcomed and embraced.

<sup>viii</sup> From *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, as quoted in Martin Thielen. *Ancient-Modern Worship: A Practical Guide to Blending Worship Styles*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000, 106.

<sup>ix</sup> This would be a departure of practice for my church, as Communion was always received in the pews.