
Too often the liturgical wars today dichotomize between a ‘horizontal immanence’ wherein liturgy supposedly celebrates the life of the assembly and a ‘vertical transcendentalism’ focused on divine worship. Such a division dismisses the former as merely human and rushes to privilege liturgical symbols that evoke mystery, majesty, and awe. Such dichotomies fail to realize that the liturgical assembly itself as the ecclesial body of Christ is not merely a sociological phenomenon, but a privileged locus of God dwelling with and among his people. When Judith Kubicki undertook to present a comprehensive theology of the presence of Christ within the gathered assembly, she provided the antidote to such misguided dichotomies. The subject of her book is the presence of Christ as symbolized within the assembly gathered for worship. The focus is on the presence of Christ, the experience of that presence in the assembly, and the symbolizing activity of the liturgy that evokes that presence. This is no mere horizontalism.

Chapter 1 situates sacramental theology within a postmodern context, addressing the characteristics of postmodernism that influence religious belief and practice, the role sacramentality plays in the contemporary Catholic imagination, and how ‘presence’ is understood and perceived in a postmodern world. Here Kubicki relies on phenomenology and the thought of Louis-Marie Chauvet to explore questions of presence and absence, disclosure of presence, and perception. In worship that which is experienced as absent, namely the resurrected Christ, is brought to a kind of presence through the multifaceted symbolizing activity of the liturgy.

Chapter 2 discusses the significance of gathering and the sacramentality of the gathered assembly. The presence of the resurrected Christ in the assembly is one of the manifold presences of Christ in the liturgy attested to in ecclesiastical documents such as *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (1964), *Mysterium Fidei* (1967), *Eucharisticum Mysterium* (1967), the *General Introduction to the Roman Missal* (1973, 2002) and developed by such theologians as Karl Rahner, Edward Schillebeeckx, Piet Schoonenberg, and Louis-Marie Chauvet. In this theological account of gathering, the importance of unity for symbolizing the resurrected Christ is highlighted – both the unity of the assembly with Christ and the unity of the members among themselves. Provocatively she asks
whether the loss of the community’s consciousness of itself as the body of Christ contributed to the Eucharistic controversies regarding the real presence of Christ. Both were casualties of the loss of symbolic consciousness. Kubicki holds that the assembly must experience itself as Church (what she understands by the gospel mandate ‘to be one’) as a prerequisite for a sense of Christ’s presence to us, our presence to Christ, and to each other.

Chapter 3 applies the semiotic frameworks of Charles Sanders and Michael Polany to an analysis of liturgical symbols, particularly to examine how the symbols in the gathering rite – architecture, gestures, postures, and music – disclose the presence of Christ to the liturgical assembly. This chapter attends to the non-verbal components of the assembly. Kubicki’s analysis of the symbolic activity of the gathering rite in light of current praxis and Church legislation discloses the tensions over placement of the tabernacle and postures of kneeling or standing during the Eucharistic prayer. She rightly suggests that these conflicts reveal a lack of consensus regarding the complementarity of the various modes of Christ’s presence in the liturgy and an under-valuing of the presence of Christ in the assembly.

Chapter 4 explores the sacramentality of time, examining the significance of observing the Lord’s Day and the consecration of time in the Divine Office. The emphasis is on the community’s gathering as an expectation of an encounter with Christ in their midst and the eschatological nature of the liturgy. The discussion of the Divine Office seems to move somewhat away from a theology of the assembly to a theology of time. Her topic would have suggested more of a focus on the assembly within time.

The final chapter stresses the energetic relationality and impulse towards unity that undergirds liturgical celebration. It emphasizes diversity rather than uniformity as the means to unity, the elements of posture, music, and significations of ‘one cup, one body’ that promote unity, and cosmic perichoretic dance that expresses the community’s unity with Christ and expectation of final eschatological union with the risen Christ.

Kubicki’s study of the assembly is at once scholarly and practical. She provides the philosophical underpinnings for a theology of the assembly and copiously cites ecclesiastical documents and liturgists. Yet she also discusses most of the major flash points in the current liturgical debates. While one may find the allusion to quantum physics not developed in enough detail to be helpful and allusions to a ‘cosmic dance’ too evocative of what conservatives would hope would not reflect liturgical action, this is a book that merits the