KERYGMA AND THE LITURGY:

ENCOUNTERING THE RISEN CHRIST IN DOM ODO CASEL’S MYSTERY

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis begins with a meditation on the role of Christ’s Resurrection in the life of the early and modern Church. In light of the evangelistic fervor that marked the apostolic era on account of the first Christians’ experience of the Resurrection, this thesis argues that the Resurrection retains a central role in any attempt to reinvigorate the Church’s missionary efforts, in particular the recent Magisterial project of the New Evangelization. Rejecting apologetics as a way to reorient evangelization around the Resurrection, I turn to the biblical Emmaus story to argue for the privileged role of the liturgy as a place of evangelistic encounter with the Risen Christ.

Turning, then, to the 20th century German Benedictine liturgist Dom Odo Casel, I spend the remainder of the thesis, with the help of the Catholic Magisterium and the theological debate his work occasioned, exploring his unique and controversial assertion that the Paschal Mystery, the historical event that so radically reordered the lives of the
first Christians, is substantially present in the sacraments. Though the majority of Catholic theologians reject his assertion, as I am also inclined, I will argue that post-conciliar sacramental theology has nevertheless “thrown the baby out with the bath water” by underemphasizing essential evangelistic elements of liturgical worship. Indeed, I lastly argue that by retrieving and clarifying Casel’s unique assertion, we can help to recover his important central insight and so articulate a kerygmatic liturgical theology for the New Evangelization.
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Chapter 1: Kerygma and the Liturgy

Death

In his popular novel Zorba the Greek, 20th century Greek philosopher Nikos Kazantzakis narrated Alexis Zorba’s poignant and pressing question for his scholar-friend:

Zorba: Why do the young die? Why does anybody die, tell me?
Scholar: I don’t know.
Zorba: What’s the use of all your damn books? If they don’t tell you that, what the hell do they tell you?1

Zorba put his finger on the most crucial and implacable fact of the human story: its inevitable end in death. Karl Barth lamented that “someday a company of men will process out to a churchyard and lower a coffin and everyone will go home; but one will not come back, and that will be me.”2 Blaise Pascal described it more bleakly: “They throw earth over your head and it’s finished forever.”3 For the Italian poet Giacomo Leopardi, because death is the only significant truth, one realizes “the infinite vanity of everything.”4

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Indeed, on the surface, death seems to render life meaningless. It is one of the few universal experiences of all people. Some are good, others are bad; some are remembered, others were hardly known to begin with; all people, though, will die. Even the scholar—the philosopher or theologian—whose books plumb the depths of human reflection on death will inescapably succumb to its dominion. In light of death’s universality, one may ask these scholars all the more urgently: “What’s the use of all your damn books?”

In a sense, the question about life’s end is also a question about life itself. In light of death, what meaning is there in life? Probing deeper, the situation appears still bleaker. Even in life, all people experience the grim hand of suffering. Experiences of illness and hunger reveal one’s weakness and dependency. Natural disasters, the viciousness of the animal world, and the sometimes disfiguring birth defects common to the human body all speak to our tragic experience of life. Even more painful, though, are the experiences of loneliness, fear, anxiety, and depression that mark our sad plight in this vale of tears. The situation appears almost desperate when we consider the widespread presence of poverty, oppression, and alienation as well as specific moral evils of human history: the exploitation and abuse of women, the Holocaust and attempted genocide of the Soviets, racially justified enslavement, or the annihilation of Native American populations, to name just a few.

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5 With respect to this pessimistic, if not materialistic, worldview I appear to have presented as almost obvious, it seems prudent to note that much of our experience, despite it being marked by tragedy and death, indicates something beyond the miseries of this world. To offer just a few examples, human dissatisfaction with the material world, the impulses of charity (willing the good of another as other; see Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 2.4 and St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II.26.4), or even the universal anxiousness about death seem to indicate the inadequacy of the materialistic worldview. Nevertheless, these hints of the transcendent—apart from God’s revelation to the Jewish people and, ultimately, in the person of Jesus Christ (and herein lies my to-be-explained point)—offer little insight into the ultimate story or destiny of existence.

Moreover, this tragic story of suffering merely brings one to the threshold of death, that final and most fearful evil. Shakespeare’s Claudio from *Measure for Measure* suggested that, compared to death, the miseries of this world are almost heavenly: “The weariest and most loathed worldly life / that age, ache, penury and imprisonment / can lay on nature is a paradise / to what we fear of death.” At best, the miseries of life are tributary to death; they remind us of death, and sometimes they even cause death. Death always has the last word; it is the last misery. In short, death rules.

The Jewish people bore witness to this disturbing dominion of death in their Old Testament Scriptures. The Book of Job, for instance, describes this wretchedness but “does not definitively answer the problem of the suffering of the innocent.” The Psalms are the great hymns of praise that mark Jewish identity, and yet the majority are psalms of lament. Note, for instance, the almost desperate prayer of Psalm 88:

Wretched, close to death from my youth,  
I have borne your trials; I am numb.  
Your fury has swept down upon me;  
your terrors have utterly destroyed me.  
They surround me all the day like a flood,  
they assail me all together.  
Friend and neighbor you have taken away:  
my one companion is darkness.

Notice, too, that the miseries of this world are likened to death:

My soul is filled with evils;  
my life is on the brink of the grave.  
I am reckoned as one in the tomb;

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I have reached the end of my strength,  
Like one alone among the dead,  
like the slain lying in their graves,  
like those you remember no more,  
cut off, as they are, from your hand.  
You have laid me in the depths of the tomb,  
in places that are dark, in the depths.¹⁰

The heart of the psalm asks the primordial question of human existence and thus brings our meditation on death to its climax:

Will you work your wonders for the dead?  
Will the shades stand and praise you?  
Will your love be told in the grave  
or your faithfulness among the dead?  
Will your wonders be known in the dark  
or your justice in the land of oblivion?¹¹

Indeed, the psalmist’s questions seem the only important ones to ask. What love is there if love cannot reach into the grave?

**The Resurrection**

Upon reflection, we have seen that contact with or the fear of death and misery appears to be our normative experience of the world; as we said, death rules. One is startled, then, by the claims of the first Christians. To start, the text of the Christian Gospels, considered even as purely historical sources, reveal that the person of Jesus evoked amazement and wonder: “Immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed, and ran up to him and greeted him.”¹² His Sermon on the Mount astounded the

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¹⁰ Psalm 88:4-7, Grail Psalter.  
¹¹ Psalm 88:11-13, Grail Psalter.  
¹² Mark 9:15.
Israelites, for “when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching.”\(^{13}\) Moreover, Christ’s remarkable baptism in the Jordan, His healings and exorcisms, as well as his violent Passion led some to declare Him the Son of God.\(^{14}\) These events in the life of Christ are essential to His saving mission. Nevertheless, historically, these mysteries were dissolved in sadness in the days after His bloody death: the disciples “had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel,”\(^{15}\) but after his death they “stood still, looking sad.”\(^{16}\) Their hopes were dashed—death appeared to have won again. They did not anticipate his Resurrection, and as Hans Urs von Balthasar explained, “Jesus’ whole life, even his Passion, was composed for the sake of [the] witness about the Resurrection.”\(^{17}\) More than that, as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger added, “if there were no Resurrection, the story of Jesus would have ended with Good Friday. His body would have decayed, and he would have become a has-been.”\(^{18}\) In F.X. Durrwell’s pithy summary, “the Church had to wait for Easter to be born.”\(^{19}\)

Not long thereafter, though, their attitudes were revolutionized. Saint Peter and the other Apostles, who knew well the psalms of lament and had just hours before believed that death ruled on, met the “men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem”\(^{20}\) with the wild assertion that “the pangs of death” have been loosed.\(^{21}\) Saint Paul, though he acknowledged

\[\text{References:}\]

13 Matthew 7:28.
14 John 1:34; Mark 3:11; Mark 15:39.
that “death reigned from Adam to Moses”\textsuperscript{22} and reiterated the desperate question—“who will deliver me from this body of death?”\textsuperscript{23}—now boldly claimed that he was set “free from the law of sin and death.”\textsuperscript{24} Even more, Paul claimed that, in the person of Jesus, death had been destroyed and immortality brought to humankind: “Our Savior Christ Jesus… abolished death and brought life and immortality to light.”\textsuperscript{25} Living under the shadow of death, what might drive someone to make these assertions? What would impel one to taunt death—“O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?”\textsuperscript{26}

Paul’s claims, and the claims of all the first Christians, are informed by their encounter with the Resurrection. We must note straight away that, as William Portier pointed out, “no New Testament book makes any mention of witnesses to the ‘raising’ or resurrection of Jesus. They find the empty tomb and meet the risen Lord in his appearances, but no one sees the actual event.”\textsuperscript{27} Nevertheless, in the appearances, the Apostles come to realize the historical fact of the Resurrection. This revelation, for our purposes, can be called an “encounter with the Resurrection.” Moreover, this encounter is the source of the Apostolic excitement and the content of their proclamation.

N.T. Wright pointed out that “all the major books and strands [of the New Testament] make resurrection a central and important topic.”\textsuperscript{28} The Resurrection so altered the Apostles’ worldview that they were impelled to boldly proclaim that which previously

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{22} Romans 5:14.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Romans 7:24.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Romans 8:2.
\item \textsuperscript{25} 2 Timothy 1:10.
\item \textsuperscript{26} 1 Corinthians 15:55.
\item \textsuperscript{28} NT Wright, \textit{The Resurrection of the Son of God} (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 476.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
appeared absurd—that death was not the last word. Indeed, death had been defeated. The Resurrection turned death on its head. Where it was once “the last enemy”\textsuperscript{29} and the tragic end to their master’s remarkable life, now Jesus’ death has become the source of eternal life. The first Christians now yearned to “proclaim the Lord’s death,”\textsuperscript{30} “preach Christ crucified,”\textsuperscript{31} and “always [carry] in the[ir] bod[ies] the death of Jesus.”\textsuperscript{32}

Herein is revealed the full impact of the Christian good news. The fundamental problem of human existence, that each person is destined for that “undiscover’d country from whose bourn / no traveller returns,”\textsuperscript{33} is definitively answered. In dying, Jesus went to the very bottom of human desolation and, in rising, opened up a new horizon of existence. The great liturgist, Jean Corbon, O.P., eloquently explained the urgent necessity of the problem of death:

> Even after [Jesus’ remarkable life] the basic question that holds men in its grip and has found no real answer remains. I exist (says every man), but I exist for death at every moment and in the final moment. Of what use to me are models of morality and fine promises of life as long as the root of this disastrous tragedy—death—has not been pulled up—not tomorrow, but now? This is the only really important question. Everything else is just a passing episode and a distraction. If the coming of God as a man did not reach to these depths, he would simply be poking fun at us. We would be left with the failure found in all the religions and ideologies: being unable to do away with death, they simply suggest that we not think of it anymore.\textsuperscript{34}

Corbon went on to reveal the power of Christ’s own death and, in turn, the revolutionary impact of His Resurrection.

\textsuperscript{29} 1 Corinthians 15:26.  
\textsuperscript{30} 1 Corinthians 11:26.  
\textsuperscript{31} 1 Corinthians 1:3.  
\textsuperscript{32} 2 Corinthians 4:10.  
\textsuperscript{34} Jean Corbon, \textit{The Wellspring of Worship} (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 45.
The coming of the river of life into our history is the only truly important event because it confronts the death that lies in wait for us… By becoming a man, the Son became ‘close to the heart of death’ and then entered into it; that is the decisive event, in fact, the only decisive event. In Jesus alone does God become event for man…[,] unreservedly, by drinking the cup of our death; not by doing good things for us in a somewhat distant way, thus making us more irresponsible than ever, but by freely offering us a share, even now, in his incorruptible life…. Jesus conquers death by his death and thereby bestows his life on us—*that* is the most important event in all of history: his Cross and Resurrection.\(^{35}\)

Christ’s Paschal Mystery, then, has gone to the very bottom and, in so doing, definitively transformed existence; all things have been turned on their head.

As we have seen, Jesus’ victory over death in the Resurrection, and our own subsequent resurrections, constitute the central content of Christian faith. Moreover, Christianity stands or falls with the Resurrection in particular. Saint Paul pointed out that his revolutionary message depends on this fact: “If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain…. [and] those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.”\(^{36}\) Indeed, Paul even recognized the apparent absurdity of his lifestyle and message, but justified it in his confidence that Christ has risen and will raise the dead with Him: “Why am I in peril every hour? … I die every day! What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.’”\(^{37}\) Without the Resurrection, the whole Christian story is a deception and “if for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied.”\(^{38}\)

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\(^{36}\) 1 Corinthians 15:14, 17-18

\(^{37}\) 1 Corinthians 15:30-32.

\(^{38}\) 1 Corinthians 15:19.
Even more, the Resurrection reveals the fundamental meaning of created existence, of history, and of the drama of the human story. As Joseph Ratzinger explained, “to the Christian, faith in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is an expression of certainty that the saying that seems to be only a beautiful dream is in fact true: ‘Love is strong as death’ (Song 8:6).”

Elsewhere he elaborated beautifully:

What would it mean if Easter, the Resurrection of Jesus, had not taken place? … [It] would mean that God does not take initiatives in history, that he is either unable or unwilling to touch this world of ours, our human living and dying. And that in turn would mean that love is futile, nugatory, an empty and vain promise… All this makes clear what Easter does mean: God has acted. History does not go on aimlessly. Justice, love, truth—these are realities, genuine reality… [Easter] is not [just] an account of a miracle that happened a very long time ago: it is the breakthrough which has determined the meaning of all history.

Encountering the Risen Christ, the radical news that God had acted in human history—that the God-Man, Jesus Christ, had destroyed death and so turned the world upon its head—was revealed to the Apostles. This most extraordinary turn of events, which fundamentally reordered their synthesis of reality, marks the vigor and excitement of the apostolic age. I offer all of this not as an apologetic, but in order to underscore the transformative effect of the Resurrection. It was the encounter with the Risen Christ, with the one who “presented himself alive after his passion,” that so revolutionized the first Christians’ account of the world.

As a result, the evangelistic fervor with which the first Christians sought to “make disciples of all nations” was marked by an extraordinary enthusiasm. This first

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40 Ratzinger, *Seek That Which Is Above*, 54-56.
41 Acts 1:3.
42 Matthew 28:19.
proclamation of the good news is often referred to as the Apostolic kerygma (Greek, κήρυγμα = “preaching”). Notice that the kerygmatic preaching of the Apostles centers on the Resurrection: “I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures.”43 Hence, in Saint Peter’s address to the crowd after Pentecost, the message hinges on the fact that though Jesus was “crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men[,] …. This Jesus God raised up, and of that [they] are all witnesses.”44 Indeed, when choosing a replacement for Judas’ Apostolic office, the Eleven demand his successor be “a witness to [Jesus’s] resurrection.”45 Moreover, the Apostles were arrested for “teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead,”46 and Saint Luke succinctly summarized their lives as one of communion and giving “testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.”47 All of this reveals that the content of that unique kerygmatic preaching, the indispensable center of early Christian life, was Jesus’ Resurrection from the dead.

Hence kerygma, or, more specifically, the fervor and excitement which marked kerygma, lies at the heart of the Christian story. Any attempt, then, to reinvigorate Christian life or, in particular, evangelism, will be aided by a reorientation around that which so radically transfigured the lives of the first Christians and sent them out with good news: the Resurrection.

43 1 Corinthians 15:3-4.
44 Acts 2:23, 32.
45 Acts 1:22.
46 Acts 4:2.
The New Evangelization

A hallmark of Saint Pope John Paul II’s pontificate was his calling for a New Evangelization in those places that were once marked by faith but have subsequently lost contact with their Christian roots. As he explained in his mission statement for the new millennium, “in countries evangelized many centuries ago, the reality of a ‘Christian society’… is now gone. Today we must courageously face a situation which is becoming increasingly diversified and demanding.”\(^48\) In *Redemptoris Missio*, he explained that, in some places, “entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel.”\(^49\) The fervor that marked the lives of the first Christians has cooled. John Paul II added that “in this case what is needed is a ‘new evangelization’ or a ‘re-evangelization.’”\(^50\)

John Paul II’s desire essentially took up the task of the Second Vatican Council which aimed, in part, “to adapt more suitably to the needs of our own times those institutions which are subject to change.”\(^51\) Though post-conciliar theology often emphasized the Council’s teaching on “the distribution of power in the Church, the reform of the liturgy, ecumenism, interfaith relations, and dialogue with the modern world,”\(^52\)

\(^{50}\) John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, §33.
often overlooked was the Council’s emphasis on evangelization. Ten years after the Council’s close, Pope Paul VI explained that “the objectives of [Vatican II] are definitively summed up in this single one: to make the Church of the twentieth century ever better fitted for proclaiming the Gospel to the people of the twentieth century.”\(^{53}\) Even before turning to the decree on the Church’s missionary activity, \textit{Ad Gentes Divinitus}, one can flesh out the Council’s evangelical impulse. \textit{Lumen Gentium}, as Avery Dulles S.J. pointed out, “begins with the assertion that Christ is the light of all nations, and that the Church as his sacrament strives to shed his radiance on all human beings.”\(^{54}\) \textit{Dei Verbum}, in a striking passage, claimed that the Council “wishe[d] to set forth authentic doctrine… so that by hearing the message of salvation the whole world may believe, by believing it may hope, and by hoping it may love.”\(^{55}\) \textit{Gaudium et Spes}, too, spoke about evangelization as a way of making the light of the Gospel shine in all places.\(^{56}\) Thus, Paul VI’s (as well as John Paul II’s) call for “a new period of evangelization”\(^{57}\) takes up the clear concerns of the Second Vatican Council.

More recently, the call for a New Evangelization has taken on a more explicit role in the Church’s life. Pope Benedict XVI, for example, established a Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization and even named the New Evangelization as the

\(^{54}\) Dulles, “Vatican II and Evangelization,” 2.
\(^{57}\) Paul VI, \textit{Evangelii Nuntiandi}, §2.
theme of the 2012 Synod of Bishops. Pope Francis’ 2013 Apostolic Exhortation, Evangelii Gaudium, crowned that Synod and revealed his own particular pastoral program. Francis revealed that, in more recent times, the Magisterium has begun to more broadly conceive the goals of the New Evangelization. Following the program of John Paul II, Francis explained that those “expanses where Christians are no longer the customary interpreters or generators of meaning… are a privileged locus of the new evangelization.”

Nevertheless, the 2012 Synod, as Pope Francis pointed out, explained “that the new evangelization is… carried out in three principal settings:” 1) “ordinary pastoral ministry;” 2) “the baptized whose lives do not reflect the demands of baptism;” 3) “those who do not know Jesus Christ or who have always rejected him.” Irrespective of the specific goals of each papacy or synod of bishops, the Church has put the project of evangelization at the forefront of its modern identity. In short, the New Evangelization has become the preeminent project of the post-conciliar Catholic Church.

What might this New Evangelization look like? Bearing in mind our reflection on the Resurrection and its historical importance as the kerygmatic key of evangelization, we may posit that the New Evangelization would be aided by an orientation around that first proclamation. Indeed, the energy of the early Church’s kerygma must inform any attempt to revive the Church’s missionary efforts. Hence John Paul II “often repeated the summons to the new evangelization… in order to insist that we must rekindle in ourselves the impetus

of the beginnings and allow ourselves to be filled with the ardor of the apostolic preaching.”

Francis, too, counselled that “we do well to keep in mind the early Christians… who were filled with joy, unflagging courage and zeal in proclaiming the Gospel.”

As we mentioned above, what marked the preaching of the first Christians was their emphasis on the Resurrection. Indeed, N.T. Wright has summarized the Gospels’ portrayal of the Resurrection as “Jesus is risen, therefore you have work ahead of you.”

Contact with the Resurrection impels one toward evangelization.

Pope Francis has explicitly identified the Resurrection’s privileged role in evangelization. In an early interview with *La Civiltà Cattolica*, for instance, Francis explained that “the church sometimes has locked itself up in small things, in small-minded rules. The most important thing is the first proclamation: Jesus Christ has saved you.”

Even more, the Pope’s words from his 2014 Easter Vigil homily succinctly summarize the assertion: “the Gospel is very clear: we need to go back there, to see Jesus risen, and to become witnesses of his resurrection... It is returning to our first love, in order to receive the fire which Jesus has kindled in the world and to bring that fire to all people, to the very ends of the earth.”

When one encounters the Risen Jesus, they receive the fire of kerygmatic excitement—“those who have come into genuine contact with Christ cannot

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61 Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, §263.
keep him for themselves, they must proclaim him.”\textsuperscript{65} The New Evangelization will only be effective if it offers to the world that which lies at the center of the Christian story: Christ’s rising from death.

\textbf{He Was Known To Them in the Breaking of the Bread}

It may be tempting to conclude that a turn to evidential apologetics should form the structure of the modern missions, of pastoral ministries, or even academic theology. Is it not the case that, by historically proving Christ’s Resurrection from the dead, only the very hard of heart will fail to embrace Christian faith? Without dismissing its important role in strengthening the faith of Christian believers, we cannot assert that apologetics is the avenue by which the New Evangelization will succeed. On the contrary, faith in Jesus is never something proven or deduced from historical circumstances. As the \textit{Catechism of the Catholic Church} teaches, “faith is an entirely free gift that God makes to man.”\textsuperscript{66} Matthew Levering elaborated, “No matter how historically plausible, affirming the reality of the glorious resurrection of Jesus… requires faith, even for those who witnessed the risen Jesus”\textsuperscript{67}—even doubting Saint Thomas’ confession required the gift of faith. As summarized by Josef Jungmann, S.J., “Apologetics, even in the best of circumstances, only leads up to the faith; it does not enter within it. Hence, it is not the solution.”\textsuperscript{68}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{65} John Paul II, \textit{Novo Millenio Ineunte}, §40.
\textsuperscript{67} Matthew Levering, \textit{Jesus and the Demise of Death} (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012), 34.
\end{flushright}
What, then, is the solution? Benedict XVI offers a more convincing approach: “Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea [or, we might add, a historical deduction], but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”69 It is the encounter with Jesus that brings a person to Christian faith. The language of the New Evangelization has been language of encounter, not language of apologetics. Even more, since we have identified the Resurrection as the central and indispensable event informing early Christian evangelistic fervor, we can conclude that an encounter with Christ—an encounter that makes manifest His glorious Resurrection—is the preeminent locus of evangelistic potential. Just as their encounter with the Resurrection—seeing Jesus alive again—animated the first Christians into kerygmatic faith, so an encounter specifically with the Risen Christ, here and now, appears to be the most fruitful and efficacious way of animating the New Evangelization.

Where, though, does one encounter the Risen Jesus? A brief reflection on Saint Luke’s account of the Emmaus story may help to uncover the answer. Luke recounted the traveling of two disciples from Jerusalem to Emmaus on the morning of Easter Sunday.70 Though they spoke of Jesus’s death and of the women’s account of the empty tomb, “they stood still, looking sad”71—they did not believe. On the road, the Risen Jesus appeared to them and, having heard their story, opened to them the Scriptures72 and shared a meal.73 During the meal,

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He took the bread and blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight. They said to each other, “did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?” And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem.74

Immediately after their meal with Jesus, the disciples raced back to the Eleven and “told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.”75

The Church Fathers saw this Emmaus meal as a Mass. Indeed, in developing the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the Church has followed the outline of this meal, wherein “[Jesus] opens the Scriptures and breaks the bread.”76 Herein one sees the fundamental connection between Jesus’ Resurrection and the Church’s liturgy. The Emmaus story reveals that the Mass is a Resurrection appearance. Hence, after the modern liturgy’s words of institution, many of the faithful have been taught to make the words of St. Thomas’ Resurrection appearance their own: “My Lord and my God!”77 Moreover, Joseph Ratzinger has argued that the Resurrection is “the founding event on which all Christian liturgy rests,”78 and F.X. Durrwell noted that the Apostles “characterize[d] the witnesses of the Resurrection as those who ‘did eat and drink with him

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77 John 20:28.
78 Ratzinger, Introduction to Christianity, 310.
after he arose again from the dead.’”79 This connection, Durrwell argued, is why the Mass “came later to be fixed for the first day of the week… the day of the resurrection.”80

Notice that part of what was made known to the disciples was the *transitus Domini*—Christ’s moving from death to life. When He opened the Scriptures, for instance, He did so to point out the necessity “that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory.”81 Thus, the axis-point event around which history revolves was, in some way, made manifest to the disciples, and their eyes were opened. The liturgy today offers this same phenomenon. Ratzinger summarized the connection between the Resurrection and the liturgy: “[Luke] provides both a theology of the Resurrection and a theology of the liturgy: one encounters the risen Christ in the word and in the sacrament; worship is the way in which he becomes touchable to us and recognizable as the living Christ.”82 In short, the liturgy is a privileged place of encounter with the Risen Christ.83

Notice too that encountering Christ in the Emmaus Mass initiated the disciples into that fundamental excitement of kerygmatic preaching. In Durrwell’s words, “by [this meal] they were introduced into the sphere of the risen Christ.”84 More than that, this encounter spurs them on to evangelism: “they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem.” Indeed, they returned to the Apostles and made the first proclamation their own: “the Lord has risen indeed!”85 The Emmaus story reveals that, in some way, the Mass can bring people to

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82 Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 309.
83 This is not to say that the liturgy is the only place wherein Christ can manifest his Resurrection. It is, nevertheless, a privileged place.
85 Luke 24:34.
faith—a faith that causes “our hearts [to] burn within us” and impels toward evangelization. If we are to reinvigorate the New Evangelization with kerygmatic enthusiasm, we must turn to the liturgy.

**Dom Odo Casel’s Mystery Theology**

In previous sections, I asserted that encounter with the Resurrection explains the unique evangelistic fervor marking the Apostolic age. I have further argued that a focus on the liturgy, wherein the Risen Christ is encountered in a way that both excites faith and inspires evangelization, is the way forward for the New Evangelization. Traditionally, the Church identifies four presences of Christ in the Mass: Christ is present in the presiding priest, in the Word proclaimed, in the assembly gathered, and—most of all—He is substantially present in the Eucharist.\(^8^6\) Clearly, Christ’s presence, in all four ways, is the primary operative principle of the liturgy’s evangelistic energy. It is Christ who converts. Nevertheless, one can speak of another form of presence, not a presence of Christ the divine person, but, in some way, a presence of the _transitus Domini_—the historical event of the Paschal Mystery.\(^8^7\) Hence, on the road to Emmaus, wherein Christ was made known in the breaking of the bread, the disciples encountered the real historical presence of the Death and, more importantly, the Resurrection of Jesus. Though, as mentioned, the New


\(^{8^7}\) This thesis will, in part, try to prove this assertion based on an exploration of the Church’s Magisterial texts. For now, let the words of Pope Pius XII’s _Mediator Dei_ suffice: “the august sacrifice of the altar… is no mere empty commemoration of the passion and death of Jesus Christ, but a true and proper act of sacrifice, whereby the High Priest by an unbloody immolation offers Himself a most acceptable victim to the Eternal Father, as He did upon the Cross” (§68).
Testament never relates an Apostle witnessing the event of the Resurrection itself, the Emmaus story reveals that an encounter with that event is sacramentally available in the Mass. The point is this: if the very same event, the same transitus Domini which transformed the Apostles into kerygmatic evangelizers, was present in the Mass at Emmaus, then the same extraordinary encounter is available to the churchgoer in every modern Mass. Real contact with this radical reordering of the world’s logic from death to life is accessible at every altar. As Durrwell explained, “the Eucharist is a taking hold of the death and resurrection of Jesus. It unites the believer to Christ’s death by associating him with the Resurrection.” Hence, the churchgoer too enters into this movement from death to life in the Mass and can enter into the excitement of the kerygmatic Church. This liturgical encounter with the Resurrection, I argue, is a fruitful way forward for the New Evangelization.

In this project’s attempt to analyze the kerygmatic power of the Paschal Mystery’s re-presented and sacramental presence in the liturgy, the “Mystery Theology” of 20th Century German Benedictine Dom Odo Casel provides a fruitful place for investigation. As Aidan Nichols, O.P. explained, “Casel set out to provide… an evangelical ontology of the Liturgy, an account of the Liturgy as an epiphany of the Gospel of grace which would throw light on the unique reality which the Liturgy both is and also brings into our midst.” What Casel offered was a remarkable way to encounter Christ in the Mass—a unique kind of contact with the saving events of Jesus’ life. For Casel, the Mass re-presents the

88 Durrwell, The Resurrection, 326.
historical event of Calvary substantially. Thus, the churchgoer really encounters the
transitus Domini in every liturgy because it is presently occurring at that moment in history.
Calvary is now. Though I will not ultimately share the fullness of Casel’s assertion, his
principal task of meditating over how the mysteries of Christ’s life, in particular his Death
and Resurrection, are present in that re-presentation of the one sacrifice of the Cross will
help to uncover the liturgy’s evangelistic potential.

Moreover, as Burkhard Neunheuser has attempted to show, “the Second Vatican
Council [which is a starting point for this investigation into the New Evangelization]
emphasized ideas which Casel was the first modern to urge in a powerful way [and]...
Casel’s theological conception is still very much alive.” 90 Indeed, Casel’s Mystery
Theology “has been adopted and developed in some of the most authoritative works of
modern scholarship,” 91 and thus a thorough study and assessment of his innovative thought
is essential in determining the liturgy’s role in the New Evangelization. Hence, on account
of Casel’s enduring influence on Sacrosanctum Concilium and the post-conciliar Church,
as well as his underlying impact on modern liturgical studies, he warrants a thorough
theological retrieval and analysis. Additionally, since we are investigating this for the sake
of the New Evangelization, it will be helpful to situate Casel in light of alternative trends
in modern sacramental theology in order to determine what his thought offers to the current
conversation. For instance, post-conciliar theology has largely sought to blur the
distinctions between the seven sacraments proper and the sacramental nature of the world

at large. Casel, on the contrary, emphasized a unique sacramental ontology that has evangelistic potential. I will argue that a retrieval of this emphasis will aid in developing a more evangelistic understanding of the liturgy.

In the second chapter, I will outline Casel’s theology and what it offers for evangelization. In the third chapter, I will assess his theology in light of the Church’s Magisterium and the theological debate his work occasioned. In the final chapter, I will offer my own conclusions and reveal how a retrieval of Casel’s Mystery Theology, even if we refrain from holding the fullness of his position, will help to offer a kerygmatic-evangelistic understanding of the liturgy.
CHAPTER 2: THE MYSTERY THEOLOGY OF DOM ODO CASEL

Introduction

In the years leading up to the Second Vatican Council, what Pope Saint John Paul II described as “a great liturgical and pastoral movement” emerged in the life of the Church. Virgel Michel’s *Orate Fratres* journal, as well as the work of liturgists like Lambert Beauduin, Maurice De La Taille, and even the writings of Pope Saint Pius X contributed to what is now called the Liturgical Movement. The achievements of this movement were immense; as Pope Pius XII described, in the Liturgical Movement,

the majestic ceremonies of the sacrifice of the altar became better known, understood and appreciated. With more widespread and more frequent reception of the sacraments, with the beauty of the liturgical prayers more fully savored, the worship of the Eucharist came to be regarded for what it really is: the fountain-head of genuine Christian devotion.

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Moreover, at Vatican II, the Council Fathers relied on and brought to fruition many of the essential insights of this Liturgical Movement. Among the movement’s most essential and influential figures, however, the German Benedictine Dom Odo Casel “has largely been passed over in silence.”

Who is Odo Casel?

Monastic Life and Work

Born in Koblenz-Lützel in 1886, the scene of several important Church synods toward the end of the first millennium, Odo Casel entered the Benedictine monastery of Maria Laach near Bonn, Germany in 1905. Just three years after his ordination in 1911, Casel published his dissertation on the Eucharistic theology of Saint Justin Martyr. Though he received two doctorates (one in liturgical studies from the Pontifical Athenaeum of Saint Anselm and another in philosophy at Bonn), he eventually settled into a simple chaplaincy for a small community of Benedictine nuns in Herstelle.

As Aidan Nichols explained, “Casel had entered Maria Laach on the eve of the finest period in its history. Under Ildefons Herwegen… Maria Laach became perhaps the single most important centre of the liturgical movement in the first half of the twentieth century.” Nichols went on to explain that, “to say that Dom Odo was above all else a monk is to say that the story of his life—as distinct from his contribution to Catholic

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thought and sensibility in matters liturgical—is simply told.” Indeed, Joost van Rossum described him as “a silent and humble man who loved the solitude and the silence of the monastery,” and André Gozier as “a man of cell, choir stall, and research library.”

Moreover, in the community he served in Herstelle, “he found the perfect laboratory for his lifelong work.”

During the 1920’s and 30’s, as editor of the *Jahrbuch für Liturgiewissenschaft* (*Yearbook of Liturgical Studies*), he founded the school of Mystery Theology which Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, speaking of Casel’s thought in general, called “perhaps the most fruitful theological idea of our century.” Nichols even called Casel “a giant among theologians of the Liturgy and a figure raised up by Providence to salvage from perils the worship of the Church.”

*Death and Legacy*

During the Easter Vigil Mass of 1948, Casel collapsed after singing the *Lumen Christi*. The announcement from the abbess and nuns of his monastery recounts with reverence the end of his life:

As the faithful deacon of the eternal High Priest Jesus Christ, having begun the sacred liturgy of Easter, he, whose thought and life were centered in the *opus Dei*, was called by the Lord to celebrate with Him the eternal liturgy in heaven when he had just finished proclaiming the ‘*Lumen Christi*’ and was ready to intone the ‘*Exsultet*.’ His whole life was beset with bodily suffering and given to untiring labor

in sacred science; his passing over into the eternal Pentecost took place by the grace of God during the great night of the Pasch. *Deo Gratias.*

Thus the life of this giant of the Liturgical Movement ended in the quiet of his monastery on the morning of the Resurrection. It is fitting, perhaps, that the central figure in this investigation into the Resurrection’s kerygmatic power within the liturgy should be “called by the Lord to celebrate with Him the eternal liturgy in heaven” in the midst of the Easter Vigil Mass.

Though central elements of his thinking remain present in the Church’s liturgical theology, Casel’s explicit influence has waned in recent years on account of “[a] controversy that waxed very passionate in some quarters and for some time.”

In particular, a parallel Casel drew between Christian worship and pagan sacrificial cults, a starting point of his Mystery Theology (which will be explained later on), as well as his controversial interpretation of sources and “slowness in showing himself ready to offer further clarifications,” has rendered him practically unheard of in post-conciliar theology. Indeed, just one of his major works has been translated into English—his short but important book, *The Mystery of Christian Worship*—and secondary research on the school of Mystery Theology has never achieved mainstream status in contemporary liturgical studies. Nevertheless, modern Catholic liturgical thought is deeply influenced by

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Casel’s work\textsuperscript{111} and an investigation into his innovative account of the sacramental, represented presence of Christ in the Mass is essential to our exploration of the role of the liturgy in the New Evangelization. This chapter will attempt to set out Casel’s Mystery Theology, in particular his views on the liturgically re-presented Paschal Mystery, and seek to articulate its kerygmatic potential.

\textbf{Casel’s Context}

Aidan Kavanagh, O.S.B. has said that “the term ‘mystery’ has been so assimilated into the mindset and patois of ecclesiastical writers since the Second Vatican Council… that it has become slick with use and thus barely one-dimensional.”\textsuperscript{112} Sacrosanctum Concilium—“which embraced Casel’s teaching”\textsuperscript{113}—emphasized the Paschal Mystery as one of “the guiding principles of the constitution.”\textsuperscript{114} In post-conciliar theology, however, the term “mystery” has become detached from its original sense. It is often used merely to describe a truth received without the ability to explain or understand it fully.\textsuperscript{115} With respect to the “Paschal Mystery,” the phrase no longer evokes “the great secret of God’s design for

\textsuperscript{111} For an account of Casel’s influence on the Second Vatican Council and on post-conciliar liturgical theology see the previously cited Neunheuser, “Odo Casel in Retrospect and Prospect” as well as Louis Bouyer, \textit{The Liturgy Revived: A Doctrinal Commentary on the Conciliar Constitution on the Liturgy} (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964). Bouyer opens his commentary thus: “The conciliar constitution begins with a proclamation, the importance of which cannot be minimized. In that proclamation, the Church endorses one of the main contentions of the theologians who have helped give the liturgical movement its full significance. More especially, it represents the best fruit of what has been achieved in the work of pioneers like Dom Odo Casel and the whole Maria-Laach school, which now receives it due recognition” (11).

\textsuperscript{112} Aidan Kavanagh, “Introduction” in Casel, \textit{The Mystery of Christian Worship}, xi-xii.

\textsuperscript{113} Kavanagh, “Introduction” in Casel, \textit{The Mystery of Christian Worship}, xii.

\textsuperscript{114} John Paul II, \textit{Vicesimus Quintus Annum}, §5.

\textsuperscript{115} For a description of how the word ‘mystery’ has been misunderstood with respect to the ‘Paschal Mystery’ see Bouyer, \textit{The Liturgy Revived}, 11-27.
the salvation of the world”\textsuperscript{116} as Casel and the Council Fathers envisioned. Recovering Casel’s meaning, then, is an essential task in attempting to articulate his theology of sacramental presence.

\textit{Historical Context}

Since much of Casel’s Mystery Theology is a response to the currents of thought around him, to understand him, one must consider the historical background from which he emerges. Asking himself why Casel was so important to the Liturgical Movement, Nichols decided that “the answer lies in the cultural conjuncture at which Odo Casel lived, a period that was shaped by forces from that eighteenth and nineteenth century world, or sequence of worlds, which… presented Koblenz and Maria Laach with so chequered a history.”\textsuperscript{117} In Casel’s time, several different yet troubling currents had taken hold of the liturgy:

On the one hand was the neo-Classicism and rationalism of the eighteenth century; on the other, the Romanticism, nationalism, and Expressionism of the nineteenth. Translated into terms of influence on the Liturgy, these meant, in the first case, formalism and a view of the Church’s worship as primarily didactic and ethical—a vehicle for instruction and moral uplift, and, in the second, a sentimentalized picture of the Liturgy which would see it as a celebration and release of feeling (Romanticism), an embodiment of ethnic and cultural community (nationalism), and a manifestation of gifts already bestowed, along with wounds needing healing, in the individual self (Expressionism).\textsuperscript{118}

Hence, Casel was looking for a way to recover the Church’s authentic liturgy in the midst of these unfortunate influences. He sought a third alternative:

Offered this choice between Scylla and Charybdis—a rationalized Liturgy or a sentimentalized one—Odo Casel divined that a true approach to the Liturgy must

\textsuperscript{116} Bouyer, \textit{The Liturgy Revived}, 17.
\textsuperscript{117} Nichols, “Odo Casel Re-visited,” 155.
\textsuperscript{118} Nichols, “Odo Casel Re-visited,” 155.
avoid both by heading out for deeper waters. What was needed, and what Casel set out to provide, was an evangelical ontology of the Liturgy, an account of the Liturgy as an epiphany of the Gospel of grace which would throw light on the unique reality which the Liturgy both is and brings into our midst.  

Moreover, in addition to these liturgical trends were larger intellectual movements that had taken hold in the world at large. In particular, Casel was reacting to the grip of rationalism and the theological formulae of Neo-Scholasticism.

**Historical Context—Rationalism**

In his post-Enlightenment intellectual climate, a pervasive rationalism began to grip the Western world. In the opening paragraphs of *The Mystery of Christian Worship*, Casel claimed that “certainly at no time have men stood so in need of a ‘turning’, of conversio in the original meaning of the word, of the new life, as in our day. For never have they wandered so far away from the Mystery of God, or stood so near to death.”

From what, though, must people in the modern world turn? Casel eloquently and at length described the typical worldview of his day:

The Mystery of God… has become a burden to man, a burden of which he would gladly be quit…. He will have no eternal law or independent will above himself; he wants to be free of every tie not of his own making, to be his own last end… Nature is his to master, it is to become his empire and the subject of his scientific, merely rational, investigations… There is only matter, which is to be subjected to factual investigations… The cosmos is emptied of its spiritual content… nature is no longer symbol, a transparency of higher realities. She breathes no secrets which make man cry…. Man has explored the deepest reaches of nature; every day the earth loses size and depth… Nature, dethroned and stripped bare, has nothing left to it except the business of making man’s life easier.

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For Casel, even the mysteries of the human person have been measured and subsequently disregarded:

[T]here might have remained the unsearchable depths of the human soul. But these depths, too, have been probed and subjected to the searchlight of psycho-analysis; what glimmers there has been revealed as a confused mass of half-suppressed, sensual desires and wishes, more inspiring repulsion and fear than any other reaction. Love, religion, friendship, ideals—all have been exploded as mere nervous twitchings… Modern man thinks that he has thus finally driven out the darkness of the Mystery, and that he stands at last in the clear light of sober reason and self-conscious, autonomous will, for the first time truly master of the world.\footnote{Casel, \textit{The Mystery of Christian Worship}, 3.}

Unfortunately, the materialism he describes was not limited to the secular worldview. Throughout the 18th century, the rationalist philosophies of Baruch Spinoza (d. 1677) and Gottfried Leibniz (d. 1716), as even the contemporary-to-Casel 1914 \textit{Catholic Encyclopedia} pointed out, had “a profound influence upon contemporaneous German religious thought, providing it with a rationalistic point of view in theology and exegesis. German philosophy in the eighteenth century was, as a whole, tributary to Leibniz… [and] was marked by an infiltration of English Deism and French Materialism.”\footnote{\textit{Catholic Encyclopedia}, s.v. “Rationalism,” accessed January 17, 2015, http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12652a.htm.} At best, religion was permitted in the post-Enlightenment milieu as a way to organize the social order through strong ethical prescriptions and, at times, as an institution that can help the state control the masses.\footnote{See Kavanagh, “Introduction” in Casel, \textit{The Mystery of Christian Worship}, xii.} Moreover, the First World War bore witness to the destructive capabilities of materialist impulses and left Europe’s people, in Pius XII’s words, “rent… asunder with rivalry and slaughter.”\footnote{Pius XII, \textit{Mediator Dei}, §12.}
All of this, as Kavanagh recounts, “produced a desiccated religion asleep on the breast of rationalism.”\(^{126}\) Thus Casel’s theology was an explicit response to the entrenched rationalist philosophy of the Western world and especially to the religious and theological tendencies within his own Germany. For Casel, the emphasis on mystery, properly understood, could act as an antidote to the world’s zeitgeist.

*Historical Context—Neo-Scholasticism*

Casel theology was also a reaction against Neo-Scholastic trends in sacramental theology. In fact, Casel links the rise of excessive forms of Neo-Scholasticism to the dominant rationalist worldview: “nor did the new spirit [rationalism] leave the sphere of religion and the Church untouched…. The attempt was made… to exhaust the secrets of God’s revelation with reason; to dissect it, and to ‘demonstrate’ its truth.”\(^{127}\) For Casel, God’s transcendent otherness and the mysteries of His Incarnation had become trapped within systematic formulae. A renewed reverence for the mystery was necessary: “Rationalism and mystery do not go well together.”\(^{128}\)

In typical Neo-Scholastic syntheses, emphasis lay almost exclusively upon a sacrament’s efficacy as an instrumental cause of grace. Though Casel affirmed that the sacraments were in fact instrumental causes of grace, he saw this over-emphasis as a narrow-minded departure from the authentic sacramental thinking of the Middle Ages and even from the Church Fathers, who, in Casel’s reading, acknowledged the objective


holiness of the sacraments in themselves apart from their role as instruments of grace.\textsuperscript{129} Indeed, Casel felt that Neo-Scholasticism tended toward an exogenous emphasis on efficient causality and was trapped within speculative theories regarding how the faithful are sacramentally sanctified.\textsuperscript{130} Moreover, Neo-Scholastics claimed that “the presence of the work of redemption is adequately explained by the presence of the effects of the redemptive work.”\textsuperscript{131} For Casel, this “\textit{effectus} theory” vastly understated the Church’s conception of sacramental presence. Instead, the Church faithful must become incorporated into the work of redemption which is substantially happening at present: “Christ’s salvation must be made real in us. This does not come about through a mere application.... Rather, what is necessary is a living, active sharing in the redeeming deed of Christ.”\textsuperscript{132} Thus, much of Casel’s Mystery Theology emerged out of his disillusionment with what he saw as alarming deficiencies in the Neo-Scholastic synthesis.

Even more, Casel also responded to Baroque liturgical inclinations that, in his mind, had become totally foreign to the true spirit of Christian worship. Some liturgists like Prosper Guéranger (d. 1875)—a grandfather of the early Liturgical Movement—sought to counteract Baroque tendencies with a return to the emphases of the Middle Ages. Casel, though, as well as his abbot at Maria Laach, Ildefons Herwegen (d. 1946), had doubts about Medieval liturgical style. Indeed, summarizing the assertions of the Maria Laach liturgists, Louis Bouyer explained that “the history of the Roman Mass during the Middle Ages is

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Kilmartin, \textit{The Eucharist in the West}, 269.}
\footnote{Kilmartin, \textit{The Eucharist in the West}, 280.}
\footnote{Kilmartin, \textit{The Eucharist in the West}, 272.}
\footnote{Casel, \textit{The Mystery of Christian Worship}, 14.}
\end{footnotes}
the history of how it came to be increasingly misunderstood by the clergy as well as by the faithful, and of how it began to disintegrate through the fault of the medieval liturgists themselves.”\textsuperscript{133} Herwegen (and Casel with him) criticized a misconceived notion of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist that “served to dissolve the traditional conception of a sacramental presence into an anecdotal and picturesque idea of the liturgical actions.”\textsuperscript{134} Casel felt that neither the emphases of the Baroque period nor of the Middle Ages, which were progressing within then-contemporary liturgical theology, were able to capture the authentic spirit of Christian worship.

\textit{Historical Context—Conclusions}

For Casel, the answer to Baroque and Medieval styles of liturgy is not in a novel approach to sacramental presence. Nor is the answer to rationalism found in a simplistic fideism or an increased emphasis on the incomprehensibility of God. What is needed, for both situations, is a return to the sources of Christian faith. “He was convinced of the need to return to origins, to early Christian times. The freshness and purity of the beginnings was thought to provide better ground for attaining the mystery of worship than the Christianity of the contemporary rationalistic world.”\textsuperscript{135} The kerygmatic implications of this attitude are obvious. In returning to the sources of Christian faith, to “that mysticism which blooms in the heart of the church herself, which belonged to her very being from the first,”\textsuperscript{136} Casel sought to re-energize his contemporaries with the excitement of the first

\textsuperscript{133} Bouyer, \textit{Liturgical Piety}, 16.
\textsuperscript{134} Bouyer, \textit{Liturgical Piety}, 16. Bouyer’s text also provides examples and a more clear description of what Casel and Herwegen found so off-putting in the medieval liturgy.
\textsuperscript{135} Kilmartin, \textit{The Eucharist in the West}, 275-276.
\textsuperscript{136} Casel, \textit{The Mystery of Christian Worship}, 50.
proclamation. By stripping away Baroque and Medieval tendencies, he sought to redress Christian worship by way of the Patristic mind: “what better way is there of understanding any institution than to study it at the period when it is still filled with its primitive vitality?”137

**The Hellenistic Religions**

Casel began his meditation on the early Church by reflecting on the timeless religious convictions of human worship. Why is it, for example, that humans have always offered sacrifices? Moreover, he gave special consideration to the pagan mystery religions in the midst of which Christianity emerged (the most controversial aspect of his theology). It must be remembered that Casel’s contemplation of the mystery cults does not reflect a desire to know these pagan religions in themselves, to legitimize non-Christian worship, or even to suggest a direct dependence of Christian worship on these pagan models. Instead, Casel studied them because he felt this Gentile context could help uncover the influences which formed Christian liturgical vocabulary in its most formative years: “The ‘plenitude of time’ when Christianity came into the world was peculiarly well-suited to give form to the liturgy. It was the mark of the entire ancient world that it had shaped the indwelling symbolism of the natural world into an elaborate yet simple language.”138 In Casel’s mind, the mystery religions bear witness to a universal longing of the human imagination, but

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they also help to explain the sacrificial terminology and imagination that marks Christian liturgy in the early Church—“the ancient church lived in mystery.”

For Casel, the Hellenistic mystery religions were a God-given type, a foreshadowing of the Divine Logos that reflected inherent religious principles brought to completion in the Paschal Mystery. The mystery religions “were only a shadow, in contrast to the Christian mysteries; but they were a longing, ‘a shadow of things to come.’” Indeed, for Casel, the pagan religious cults were, in themselves, an authentic preparation for the Mass—the “ancient, formal, communal mysticism which [marked]... the Hellenistic mysteries... found its crown in Christianity.” Moreover, Christianity accepted and brought to perfection those attributes of pagan worship which characterize what is noble and true in human longing: the “[Catholic Church] has accepted everything she found, into the world of her thinking, and thereby transformed everything; in her furnace she has cleansed everything from what was all too human, and left only the gold behind.” Nevertheless, Casel maintained that what was true and legitimate in these religions pointed to the Christian mystery and emerged not from some universality of human longing but from “a principle which stands above them all,” namely, the true Logos that guides human history.

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139 Casel, The Mystery of Christian Worship, 34.
143 Casel, The Mystery of Christian Worship, 52.
“The Lord of a Mystery”

Within the pagan religious consciousness, Casel identified an important theme by which he attempted to make its connection to Christian worship more clear. Casel turned to the eleventh book of Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*, famously called “The Golden Ass” by Saint Augustine, wherein one is brought “extraordinarily well into the mood of the mystery religions.”144 Revealed in that story of Lucius and Isis is what Casel called “the Lord (Kyrios) of a mystery,” the unifying principle that lies behind Christian and pagan forms of worship and is most clearly revealed in the Paschal Mystery:

The *Kyrios* of a mystery is a God who has entered into human misery and struggle, has made his appearance on earth (epiphany) and fought here, suffered, even been defeated; the whole sorrow of mankind in pain is brought together in a mourning for the god who must die. But then in some way comes a return to life through which the God’s companions, indeed the whole of nature revives and lives on. This was the way of pious faith and sacred teaching… [and] of society in the earliest mythical age.145

This story, for Casel, resides at the center of human longing and explains why divine resurrection stories appear over and over again in the human religious consciousness.

English scholar C.S. Lewis, who incidentally re-narrated a different part of *Metamorphoses* in his *Till We Have Faces*, made a similar observation. Lewis suggested that “God sent the human race… good dreams: … those queer stories scattered all through the heathen religions about a god who dies and comes to life again and, by his death, has somehow given new life to men.”146 In his essay “Myth Became Fact,” Lewis expanded upon this assertion and offered a way to more clearly understand Casel’s Mystery

Theology. Lewis says that one must make a distinction between truth and reality; the truth is that which accurately describes a reality, which in turn may or may not have been realized in fact or in history.\textsuperscript{147} Thus, the fundamental religious reality is the recurring theme of death and resurrection—to use Casel’s phrase, “the Kyrios of a mystery.” It is fitting, then, that human beings, always yearning for the fundamental reality in their “good dreams,” should be attracted to resurrection stories: “it is the myth that gives life.”\textsuperscript{148} Moreover, in Christ’s Death and Resurrection recounted in the Gospels, the “myth became fact,” the mysterious reality for which the human imagination longs became historical; the \textit{Logos} dwelt among us. In Lewis’ words:

The heart of Christianity is a myth which is also a fact. The old myth of the Dying God, \textit{without ceasing to be myth}, comes down from the heaven of legend and imagination to the earth of history. \textit{It happens}—at a particular date, in a particular place, followed by definable historical consequences. We pass from a Balder or an Osiris, dying nobody knows when or where, to a historical Person crucified… \textit{under Pontius Pilate}. By becoming fact it does not cease to be myth: that is the miracle… To be truly Christian we must both assent to the historical fact and also receive the myth (fact though it has become) with the same imaginative embrace which we accord to all myths.\textsuperscript{149}

Thus Lewis, as a scholar of literature, helps to elucidate Casel’s position. In Christ, that universal longing of the human heart is definitively answered and made clear. As Casel articulated it,

The ancient world had a shadowy foreboding of the mystery… God’s coming in the flesh fulfilled and more than fulfilled all longing and all promise; this event gave the word \textit{mysterium} a new and deepened meaning… In the Son of God made

\textsuperscript{147} For a recent exploration of this philosophical concept see Kurt Pritzl, ed., \textit{Truth: Studies of a Robust Presence} (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2009).
\textsuperscript{149} Lewis, “Myth Became Fact,” 343. Italics are original.
man and crucified we look upon the mystery of God which was hidden before the ages, but through Christ is made known and revealed to the ecclesia.\textsuperscript{150}

\textit{Mystery and Worship}

The connection Lewis drew between “the heathen religions” and the Paschal Mystery of Christianity was essentially the same as Casel’s parallel. Casel, however, furthers the claim, and in so doing, provides an answer for one of the chief difficulties to Lewis’ conversion. As literature scholar Bruce W. Young explains,

\begin{quote}
[In his atheist days, Lewis] ‘couldn’t see… how the life and death of Someone Else (whoever he was) 2000 years ago could help us here and now—except in so far as his \textit{example} helped us.’ But though Christ’s example is important, at the center of Christianity seemed to be something else, something about Christ’s violent and unjust death—a death portrayed as a sacrifice—that Lewis found not only ‘very mysterious’ but even ‘silly or shocking’ (Letters 55-56). The solution to this problem would be a deepened understanding of myth.\textsuperscript{151}
\end{quote}

Indeed, Casel’s own Mystery Theology provides that “deeper understanding of myth” and explains how the Paschal Mystery can “help us here and now.”

Casel’s conception of ancient mystery did not end with the common story of death and resurrection, but extended into memorial worship. In an article on “The Meaning of the Mystery,” Casel explained that, biblically speaking, “anyone who has gone more deeply into the history of the word \textit{Mysterion} is aware that the primitive meaning of the word lies in worship.”\textsuperscript{152} Just as the \textit{Logos} is always present in the providential guidance of history, so the phenomenon of death and resurrection that marks “the \textit{Kyrios} of a mystery” must

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\textsuperscript{150} Casel, \textit{The Mystery of Christian Worship}, 6.
\end{flushright}
always be current and is re-realized in memorial rites: “the world… is always in need of life; so the epiphany goes on and on in worship; the saving, healing act of God is performed over and over. Worship is the means of making it real once more.”\textsuperscript{153} Something about the primordial mystery speaks to what is most true in the drama of the human story; it reaches out toward the eternal. Lewis himself hinted at this assertion in his prologue to \textit{The Pilgrim’s Regress} when he claimed that “the human soul was made to enjoy some object that is never fully given… in our present mode of subjective and spatio-temporal experience.”\textsuperscript{154} The mythical reality, the mystery, is outside of time and is, somehow, present at all times and in all places. Moreover, one is plunged into this mythical reality in the act of worship.

\textit{Christianity, Mystery, and the Mass}

Thus the sense of “mystery” in Casel’s work and, in turn, in \textit{Sacrosanctum Concilium} has become more clear. Mystery is far more than just a nod to the fact that Christianity proclaims truths beyond the comprehensive grasp of human reason. Casel explained that, “Saint Paul thinks of Christianity, the good news, as ‘a mystery’; but not merely in the sense of a hidden, mysterious teaching about the things of God.”\textsuperscript{155} His brief definition of “mystery” articulates the proper concept: “the mystery is a sacred ritual action

\textsuperscript{153} Casel, \textit{The Mystery of Christian Worship}, 53.
in which a saving deed is made present through the rite; the congregation, by performing the rite, takes part in the saving act, and thereby win salvation.”

Moreover, mystery—and more specifically, the Paschal Mystery—represented for Casel the essential meaning of the Christian religion: “the Christian thing… in its full and primitive meaning of God’s good Word, or Christ’s… is a *mysterium* as Saint Paul means the word, a revelation made by God to man through acts of god-manhood.”

The representation of that supreme act of “god-manhood,” namely, the sacrifice of the Cross represented in the Mass, is the place where the Church enters into the *mysterium* and where the essence of Christianity is realized: “The content of the mystery of Christ is, therefore, the person of the God-man and his saving deed for the church; the church, in turn, enters the mystery through this deed.”

Even more, the liturgy “is the central, and essentially necessary activity of Christian religion.”

Simply put, for Casel, Christianity is the Mass.

**The Presence of the Paschal Mystery**

Since this project seeks to reorient Christian life and evangelization around the first proclamation of Christ’s Death and Resurrection, we must now consider how Casel’s Mystery Theology articulates the presence of the *transitus Domini* in the Mass and how it might effect a kerygmatic impulse among the faithful. We have already described the starting point of Casel’s thought, namely, his return to the early Church through meditating on the Paschal Mystery as foreshadowed in pagan worship. We must now examine the

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central and most lasting feature of Casel’s theology, his unique description of sacramental presence.

“Imaging” or Participating in the Mystery

For Casel, according to Kilmartin, “the contemporaneity of the history of Christ, the real contact of this history with Christians of all generations, is the fact that must be reckoned with in theological discourse.”160 To help outline the way Christ’s Paschal Mystery is present in the liturgy, Casel made a distinction between the exterior rite and the invisible reality: “The mystery of Christ which was completed in our Lord in all reality in time is… fulfilled on us first of all in representative, symbolic forms, not purely external ones, but rather images filled with the reality of the new life which is communicated to us through Christ.”161 This notion does not depart from the traditional conception of a sacrament. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, for example, explains that “it is through the sacramental signs of his Church that the Holy Spirit carries on the work of sanctification.”162 Casel went on beautifully: “the mysterium… shines with God’s own jewels, but hides them beneath a veil which at once covers and portrays them.... The mystery is like the stones on an ancient jewelled cross, which do not change its shape, yet clothe the bareness of the wood with loveliness.”163

Casel took this concept a step further. Since the exterior rites of the Church’s liturgy are the way to reactualize and participate in the Paschal Mystery, the historical event of the

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Paschal Mystery (the invisible reality underneath the visible sacramental rites) must be present in some essential way: “In [the Mass] the consecration of the elements by God’s deed, which the priest performs in God’s power again sets out the sacrificing death of the Lord in *mysterium*. Christ, therefore, offers himself in a sacramental manner.” 164 Casel referred to this phenomenon as the liturgy’s ability to “image” the Paschal Mystery. As Kilmartin explained, the “term is used in the patristic sense, where ‘image’ conveys the idea of participation in the reality signified, or more precisely, is the epiphany of the quintessence of the thing represented.” 165

*Substantial Presence of the Historical Event*

Before moving on, it is important to remind ourselves of an important distinction. For Casel, it was not the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist that was at stake—he assumed the doctrine of transubstantiation as a given and was not interested in reexamining or deepening the concept in any sense. Casel was interested in the presence of the *historical event*, the “once for all” 166 Death and Resurrection of Jesus. As we pointed out in the last chapter (and will explore further in the next chapter), the Paschal Mystery is indeed present in some way. Casel’s unique affirmation, however, was that the event is substantially still happening in each Eucharistic liturgy: “Since Christ is no longer visible among us… we meet his person, his saving deeds, the workings of his grace in the mysteries of his worship.” 167

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165 Kilmartin, *The Eucharist in the West*, 270.
166 Hebrews 10:10.
There are no English sources that reveal Casel’s own use of the word “substantial” to describe this presence. Nevertheless, Kilmartin recounted that, in Casel’s 1928 German article, simply called “Mysteriengegenwart” (“mystery-presence”), this presence is articulated “secundum modum substantiae.”\(^{168}\) Moreover, Rose Beal has pointed out that, as his career came to a close in 1941, Casel continued to articulate this presence as “substantial.” Indeed, citing that article, Beal summarized that, for “Casel… it is ‘the essentials’ of the saving act, its substance… that [is] present.”\(^{169}\) Again, Cyprian Vagaggini described Casel’s position as a presence of the historical event “in its substance.”\(^{170}\) In my research, every expositor of Casel’s mysteriengegenwart characterized his notion of the presence of historical events, if they sought to characterize it at all, as “substantial.” Indeed, I have found not a single scholar who argues against characterizing Casel’s theory in this way.

Casel rigorously defended his thesis which, even during his life, received much resistance. He noted, for example, that the Jewish feasts, along with prayer and sacrifice, contained elements of memorial. “Because God showed himself to the Jews in historical events, these events were to be kept continually before the people’s minds.”\(^{171}\) The Passover, for example, memorialized the liberation from Egypt and thus “God’s preserving of Israel in the promised land [is] secured anew.”\(^{172}\) Reading this element of Jewish

worship typologically, Casel asserted that the historical events which Christian worship represents must eclipse the memorials of the Old Law. That event toward which Jewish worship pointed—the Cross and, in turn, the Mass—most perfectly realizes the possibility for memorial:

It was the Pasch of Christ, his bloody death, which saved the world from its sins and fed it with food of everlasting life, god-life. On the eve of the earth’s pasch, the saviour made of this pasch a complete mystery; he anticipated his death in the mystical rite, and made food of his sacrificed body, gave his blood as the foundation of a covenant. Here an historic event was celebrated but one which had its end beyond time, in God, in the passage from this aion to the world to come.\(^{173}\)

Hence, for Casel, the Mass brings to perfection the Jewish concept of memorial by substantially making present the historical events of Christ’s life.

Casel also relied upon a famous sermon of Saint Pope Leo the Great wherein he asserted, “that which till [the Ascension] was visible of our Redeemer was changed into a sacramental presence” dispensed within the Church.\(^{174}\) In Casel’s reading, the events that historically cohere with Christ’s visibility pass over, with all their substance, into the sacraments of the present day. Scripturally, Casel saw his principle implied in Saint Paul’s discourse on Baptism in Romans 6:1-11. Because the passage from death to life in Jesus happened just once historically and, in baptism, humanity is taken up into this one act, so the presence of that act—its historical content—must be substantially present in all times and in all places in the liturgy. Kilmartin explained it thus:

According to Casel, the mystery of Christian worship, what worship images and so re-presents, or reactualizes, is the very kernel of the redemptive work of Christ, namely, the passage of the Lord (transitus Domini) from death to life. This mystery

is made present liturgically; that is to say, the liturgical rites of the Church contain the redemptive drama in act.\textsuperscript{175}

In the same way that the accidents remain bread and wine after transubstantiation, so Casel explained, the exterior rite of the liturgy retains the accidents of one’s contemporary spatio-temporal experience. However, just as the substance of the bread and wine is transubstantiated into the Body and Blood of Christ, so the interior reality of the Mass is a substantial reactualization of the Paschal Mystery—the historical event is present, not again, but still. “Christ can be rendered present in many places \textit{per modum substantiae}, i.e., without temporal succession. Likewise the divine power can, and does, reactualize at different times and places the passion of Christ that took place at Calvary.”\textsuperscript{176}

Can this substantial reactualization of an historical event be explained philosophically? In a footnote, Casel complained that this “difficulty is ill-conceived, because the presence here brought to be is not a natural and historical, but sacramental one.”\textsuperscript{177} The sacramental world, wherein the typical spatio-temporal boundaries break down, is not subject to the same philosophical confines. As Kilmartin described, “metaphysical hypotheses concerning the impossibility of a renewal of historical acts, and the like, simply do not apply in the case of the sacraments.”\textsuperscript{178} This philosophical difficulty will be further explored in the next chapter.

\textit{Sacramental Presence}

\textsuperscript{175} Kilmartin, \textit{The Eucharist in the West}, 270.
\textsuperscript{176} Kilmartin, \textit{The Eucharist in the West}, 271.
\textsuperscript{177} Casel, \textit{The Mystery of Christian Worship}, 37.
\textsuperscript{178} Kilmartin, \textit{The Eucharist in the West}, 270.
What exactly is meant by the “sacramental presence” Casel articulated? Because of the liturgy’s transcendent nature, Casel was convinced of the need to uncover the interior reality of the Mass by way of its exterior symbols. In fact, the liturgy expresses an inherent need in human worship, namely, the desire to express invisible realities by way of visible and tangible signs.\(^{179}\) Casel explained that “the Saviour… adapts himself entirely through the mystery to his church’s state; and by so doing, he carries out the great saving design, the economy, which was not meant merely for those who walked with him on earth, but for all generations, and all ages until the end of this world’s time.”\(^{180}\) Thus, the substantial presence of the historical events of Christ’s life are sacramentally present by way of its expression in the liturgy’s symbolic order.

Admittedly, the mode of this presence is different from the “once for all” event of 2,000 years ago. As Louis Bouyer summarized, “the mystery is hidden. Nothing is present of the historical circumstances by which the divine action was set in its place in time and space. But the substance of the action is present, in a mysterious way, entirely real to faith.”\(^{181}\) Instead of a moment that exists linearly, as part of a successive chronology, Casel saw this sacramental presence as a presence of the act’s essence, of its substance, in itself. “Because it is not \textit{in tempore}, it is, therefore, present \textit{secundum modum substantiae}, without historical ‘before’ or ‘after,’ precisely in its kernel as the salvific act of the God-man.”\(^{182}\)

\(^{179}\) See Kilmartin, \textit{The Eucharist in the West}, 269.  
\(^{181}\) Bouyer, \textit{Liturgical Piety}, 88.  
\(^{182}\) Kilmartin, \textit{The Eucharist in the West}, 270.
To articulate this position, Casel drew on his contemporary, Abbot Anscar Vonier, O.S.B. (d. 1938), who saw in this telescoping of the spatio-temporal reality a “unity and duality of a very peculiar nature.”\(^{183}\) In studying the relationship between the Last Supper (the first Eucharistic meal) and the historical sacrifice on the Cross, Vonier was able to articulate his concept of the sacramental world wherein space and time are suspended and repurposed.\(^{184}\) How is it that the Last Supper could have been a true Eucharistic sacrifice if the sacrifice of the Cross had not yet occurred in history? Vonier’s answer proved essential for Casel’s own position:

> Once the sacramental view of the Eucharistic sacrifice is admitted, the difficulty no longer exists. As the sacrament is essentially a representation, it could be instituted at any moment by Christ…. That great act of Redemption, the immolation of Christ on the Cross, could be represented before, as well as after, His crucifixion; and though the sacrament derives all its truth and value from the death of Christ, its institution, or even its celebration or use, may precede that event. The celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice by Christ no more superseded His role on Calvary than did the first breaking of bread of the Christian Church after the coming of the Holy Spirit. Sacraments, and sacraments only, possess that aloofness from the historical sequence of events.\(^{185}\)

Thus, in the same way that the sacramental world, which is not necessarily subject to the historical sequence of time, is able to reveal how the Last Supper presents the sacrifice of the Cross, so the Eucharistic sacrifices of the present age are able to substantially present the historical acts of 2,000 years ago.

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\(^{185}\) Vonier, *A Key to the Doctrine of the Eucharist*, 93.
Even more, Casel was convinced that his was the position of the Fathers and of Saint Thomas Aquinas. As Charles Davis explained, “he did not regard himself as a speculative theologian, offering a new theory for analysis and debate, but as a simple exponent of the rich data he found in tradition and the liturgy.”

Indeed, Casel thought the patristics had articulated a presence “in mysterio” which had been lost amidst the unfortunate emphasis of Neo-Scholasticism on the efficacy of the sacraments as instrumental causes of grace. He also opposed the common Western scholastic position that the Passion is present only insofar as its effects sanctify the believer. In Casel’s mind, the Fathers considered the sacraments as entities with objective holiness, instead of just effects of Christ’s redemptive work. He wanted to underscore the Christological identity of the sacraments. As Kilmartin summarized, “In short, grace is not simply a power that flows from that salvific work [of Christ]. Rather, to share in the mystery of redemption through Christ is not so much to receive a ‘grace,’ as it is an elevation of the whole person through contact with Christ, and his redemptive work.”

Summary

In order to summarize Casel’s Mystery Theology, we will allow him to speak for himself:

These mysteries are a working out and an application of Christ’s mystery. God, who revealed himself in the man Christ, acts now, after this man has been glorified, acts now properly for the first time. He works through Christ the high-priest and the usual ordering of the Church’s means of grace in the mystery of worship, which is nothing else than the God-man acting on earth from age to age. For this reason, it, like him, shares God’s majesty and action and is hidden beneath symbols, taken

187 See Kilmartin, The Eucharist in the West, 269.
188 Kilmartin, The Eucharist in the West, 269.
from the world, which both hide and point to its reality. Thus it is possible that the Lord, though eternally glorified in heaven and visible to all, should be still hidden in the world, and go on revealing the whole strength of his glory.\textsuperscript{189}

\textbf{Casel and Kerygma}

Since this project takes up Casel’s Mystery Theology in order to elucidate the liturgy’s kerygmatic potential, we must now flesh out Casel’s own vision of the Mass as an impetus for evangelization. In Chapter 1 we singled out the enthusiasm that animates the early Church’s preaching, an enthusiasm which emerged from their encounter with the Risen Christ, as an important locus of study for the New Evangelization. Casel’s Mystery Theology, with its assertion that the historical events of Christ’s Death and Resurrection are substantially present in the liturgy, offers a theory of sacramental presence that is inherently kerygmatic.

\textit{Kerygma Through Witness of the Historical Resurrection}

Since Casel asserted that the historical events are substantially present in the liturgy, a remarkable spatio-temporal experience is available, namely, real contact with the numerically same historical event that instilled the early Church with its unique sense of mission. The event of the Resurrection, the witnessing of Christ alive again after his bloody Passion, vivified the lives of the Apostles and was the concrete source of their kerygmatic excitement—the content of the Apostolic preaching is Christ’s historical Resurrection.\textsuperscript{190} In Casel’s Mystery Theology, the breakdown of spatio-temporal reality

\textsuperscript{190} For a recent study of the Resurrection as an historical phenomenon, see N.T. Wright, \textit{The Resurrection of the Son of God} (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).
makes the same phenomenon—the opportunity to witness the Risen Christ—accessible to all people of all times and places. It is the same event in every way, except it is now sacramental. In Casel’s theology, the Mass offers intimate contact with the historical events of Christ’s life. One beholds in the Mass not just the transubstantiated presence of Christ in the Eucharist, but also that same temporal occurrence which so moved the disciples. Herein, then, the Church’s evangelistic energy is brought back to the source of Christian faith—the Church’s preaching becomes again, quite literally, the first proclamation.

Thus, in so much as the Mass substantially contains the event of the Resurrection, it could be evangelistic in two ways: 1) for the non-Christian who visits a Mass, contact with the life-changing historical Resurrection of Jesus, an encounter with the Risen Lord, is available and offered by the Church and 2) for the Christian who, theoretically, has already encountered the Risen Jesus, that event which first changed their life is made substantially present again and instills in them that same energy to evangelize that so motivated the first believers. Thus, in Casel’s system, the Mass offers a place of encounter with that event which stands at the center of history—the death and Resurrection of Jesus—and impels its witnesses toward faith in Christ and authentic enthusiasm for evangelization.

_Kerygma Through Incorporation into the Paschal Mystery_

A fundamental notion of Casel’s Mystery Theology relied on the fact that, in the liturgy, the faithful are incorporated into Christ’s redemptive act: “Through this sharing in his act, the Christian grows once more into the body; the blood purifies him again and
again, the Spirit of resurrection enlivens him and strengthens him, while the sacrificial food incorporates him more and more fully into Christ, the Lord.”

By being incorporated into this historical event, the faithful are brought into that which lies at the center of history. Christ’s Death and Resurrection reconciles humanity with God and makes it able to participate in the divine nature: “He was made man that we might be made God.” Participation in the divine life, by way of Christ’s reconciling act, bears constant witness to that act. Hence, as the Church is divinized and incorporated into Christ’s mystical body, the Church necessarily bears witness to his redemptive mission: “When we eat this Bread and drink this Cup, we proclaim your Death, O Lord, until you come again.”

Casel explained that “this mystery of Christ is what the apostles proclaimed to the Church, and what the Church passes on to all generations. Yet just as the saving design is not merely teaching, but first and foremost Christ’s saving deed, so, too, the church leads mankind to salvation not merely by word only, but by sacred actions”—namely, the liturgy.

Kerygma as an Answer to the Dominant Worldview

We saw that Casel’s Mystery Theology was, in large part, a response to the dominant rationalist worldview of his time. Though the world had largely become enraptured by scientism and materialism, Casel explained that

What happened at the dawn of history has repeated itself. Then, too, at the moment when man believed that he had obtained godhead by his own power, that

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he could recognize by the light of his own understanding what was good and evil, that he had come of age and needed no parental care, in that moment he ‘saw that he was naked’. He recognized his shame, saw himself as a king in disgrace, a monarch without a throne.  

Emerging, then, in the consciousness of some theologians is an awareness that the typical Enlightenment worldview has forgotten that which is most essential to reality: mystery, in Casel’s use of the word. The liturgy, then, contains that which the world truly seeks, the sacramental and substantial mystery of Christ’s Death and Resurrection. Casel went on: “Mankind today is sick with the rationalism of exact science and longs once more for the symbols of God’s world. It can find them, where they have always remained, in Christ’s church, where his mystery is proclaimed by the true God and shows the way to him.” Casel here explicitly revealed an evangelistic element within the Liturgy, especially with respect to the modern worldview (which the New Evangelization seeks to address). For the non-Christian, an encounter with the liturgy is an encounter with that which is their true satisfaction; it draws one into faith.

At the same time, for the Christian, encountering the mystery offers an opportunity for evangelistic preparation: “The church’s faithful… must learn once more the greatness of their treasures; they must cleanse away the rust of neglect, and let them shine once again in the light which love and knowledge brings to bear.” The Church must allow itself to be transformed by the mystery which lies at the center of its liturgy “so that [it] may show the world once more the only true and saving mysteries.”

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Conclusion

The Mystery Theology of Dom Odo Casel sought to reveal the encounter with Christ that is possible in the liturgy. Casel first sought to reorient the spirit of Christian worship around the universal sense of mystery foreshadowed in the Hellenistic religions and revealed in the Paschal Mystery of Christ. From this emphasis on mystery, Casel articulated his unique theory of sacramental presence, namely, the substantial presence of the historical events of Christ’s life. This chapter has sought to outline Casel’s theology and briefly explore its kerygmatic implications. The next chapter will examine the scholarly and Magisterial response to Casel’s theology and assess his assertions with respect to the New Evangelization.
CHAPTER 3: ASSESSING CASEL’S MYSTERY THEOLOGY

What are we to make of Casel’s Mystery Theology? Are his assertions plausible or even possible? If so, is a substantial presence of the Paschal Mystery in its historicity an efficacious way to frame our discussion of the liturgy’s kerygmatic potential? We will start by assessing his approach to the Mass by way of the pagan religious cults (a notion central to his larger understanding of the Mass) and move on to discuss his more central affirmation, the substantial presence of the Paschal Mystery.

Hellenistic Mystery Religions

The most controversial aspect of Casel’s Mystery Theology is its starting point, namely, the parallel drawn between pagan sacrificial cults and the central elements of Christian worship. In his time, Casel was addressing the assertions of the History of Religions School who revealed parallels between the Christian story of sacrifice and pagan sacrificial rites in order to demonstrate that the Christian narrative is nothing more than another mystery religion. Casel gave too much credence to this position and, instead of challenging it, felt compelled to incorporate these insights in articulating a theology that could not only answer these attacks but presuppose them. This parallel was a central feature
of his Mystery Theology—it participated in a united whole with his assertions on “mystery presence.” Even though, as Casel described to a Flemish friend, “the ancient mysteries were for [him] always only a help… to understanding the Christian mysteries,” the concept was nevertheless an important starting point in articulating the more lasting aspects of his thought. In short, Casel’s concept of Mysteriengegenwart, that the Paschal Mystery is substantially present, begins with the eternal nature of the mysterion manifested in the ancient sacrificial cults.

Nevertheless, his attempt to demonstrate this parallel has been heavily criticized and is now, with the help of more recent scholarship, largely dismissed. Indeed, Louis Bouyer, who followed Casel’s central insights, explained that “if there is one particular element in Dom Casel’s theory which needs modification, it is the general view of the mystery religions which he had accepted.” In fact, Bouyer’s thought in whole demonstrates that one can follow Casel’s position on the “mystery presence” without buying into his assertions on the Hellenistic religions. Moreover, though he was convinced of the coherence between the two positions, “[Casel] himself… said that he was quite willing to abandon this view [on the mystery religions] if it was proved necessary.” In Bouyer’s mind, the abandonment of this view was proven more than necessary: “no serious scholar today, whether opposed to or indifferent to Christian belief, would accept [this theory] as did Dom Casel.”

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Problems With Casel’s Hellenistic Parallel

In an extensive study, Bouyer revealed several problems with Casel’s position. Considered altogether, he explained that the only similarities between Christian worship and the Hellenistic rites was their recognizing the themes of death and resurrection; all other parallels have been misconstrued. In general, the pagan religions were concerned with the cycles of regeneration in nature. Recognizing their dependence on material goods, the growth of which was ultimately dependent upon elements outside of their control, their prayers were meant to efficaciously participate in this cycle of death and regeneration.\footnote{See Bouyer, \textit{Liturgical Piety}, 91.} In this sense, the Church’s participatory role in the liturgy (a “public work”) does parallel facets of sacrifice common to the Hellenistic religions.

The similarities largely end here. The Hellenists did not, for instance, think of their rites as memorials.\footnote{Bouyer, \textit{Liturgical Piety}, 81.} At its heart, their worship was not framed with a view toward history or remembrance of past deeds, but toward facilitating the progress of nature and the seasons. Indeed, this pagan emphasis, this “identification with the unchanging fatal law of nature,”\footnote{Bouyer, \textit{Liturgical Piety}, 263.} is reacted against in early Christian writings—hence Saint Paul spoke of our liberation from “the weak and beggarly elemental spirits.”\footnote{Galatians 4:8-9.} Indeed, the Incarnation opened up these cyclical attitudes toward that which is eternal and all-fulfilling. Where the cyclical “memory” of the pagan rituals was a self-referential slavery, the Cross, to
repurpose Shakespeare’s words, “shuffles off this mortal coil” in order to reconcile all things in God.\textsuperscript{207}

Moreover, the Christian concept of memorial, like the Jewish concept, incorporates a representation of that which is remembered. Since “by a single offering [Christ] has perfected for all time those who are sanctified,”\textsuperscript{208} Christian worship embodies, insofar as it too is an immolation, a memorial of and encounter with that one offering. Even if certain Hellenistic rites might celebrate past events, there is no concept of these events’ effects being made present, as there is in the Christian rite, let alone incorporation of the congregation into this event.

Further, in their religious rites, pagans had no concept of thanksgiving, of \textit{eucharistein}.\textsuperscript{209} Nor was there a properly contemplative element to their rituals. What mattered in the Hellenistic system was the facilitation of nature’s cycle. The gifts of God were not meditated over as blessings and there was no sense of mission instilled within the celebrating congregation. Pagan rites solely focused on the cyclical nature of the seasons.

There are other points of significant difference. For instance, the pagan sense of sacrifice was decidedly different from that which Christians inherited from Judaism, a point to which we will return. The pagan imagination also viewed communion differently. Where the Christian reception of communion signifies the reconciling of all nations into the

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\item \textsuperscript{207} Bouyer, \textit{Liturgical Piety}, 196.
\item \textsuperscript{208} Hebrews 10:14.
\item \textsuperscript{209} \textit{Eucharistein} is a Greek word, but one that, from the earliest Christian times, was used to “recall the Jewish blessings that… proclaim God’s works” (\textit{Catechism of the Catholic Church}, 1328).
\end{itemize}
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Church, the pagans saw their acts of communion as a sectarian way of strengthening their own unique identities.

In Christianity, it is not so much the external symbols of the rite that populate the mystery, but the interior, invisible reality that lies beneath them. But in Bouyer’s estimation, for the pagans, the *mysterion* was the rite proper and not what the rite symbolizes. In the pagan rituals, the externals hold primacy—what is most important is that the rites be celebrated properly. Bouyer explained that

[W]hatever interpretations of the rites were developed by neophytes and more or less discreetly encouraged by a sagacious clergy, the ‘mystery’ as such was not the myth, the divine history which was the oldest explanation of the rite and the first transformation of its original purpose into a higher one; nor was the ‘mystery’ the theologico-philosophical digressions which at a later date elevated the myth itself into a higher and purer realm of thought: from first to last, the ‘mystery’ as such was the rite and nothing else.

The distinction is an important one. It is hard to argue that the worship of Christians is just another iteration of pagan ritualism (as the History of Religions School argued and Casel followed) when the fundamental realities of their rites are so explicitly distinct.

Perhaps most importantly, Bouyer pointed out that, even if Christians and pagans share the themes of death and resurrection, their understanding of these mysteries differs decidedly—the mysteries of death and resurrection celebrated in the Hellenistic mystery rites are not those of the Paschal Mystery commemorated at Mass. The Christian claims that victory has been won in the death of Christ itself. Bouyer again illustrated the distinction:

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211 Bouyer, *Liturical Piety*, 93.
[I]n none of the pagan mysteries is there the least perception of such a truth. The death of the god in the mysteries was not part of the saving process, but merely a disaster which the god had not been able to avoid. If he was, at the end, not to conquer death properly speaking, but rather to be born again (only, let us not forget, to die again, and again to come to life), this was in no way due to any value inherent in his death; it was, rather, in spite of that death. The gods of the mystery religions were, as has been very well said, not so much savior gods as gods who themselves were saved.\footnote{Bouyer, \textit{Liturgical Piety}, 97.}

The Christian, on the contrary, understands that Jesus’ Passion was itself redemptive—in dying He destroyed death. The pagan conception sees no undermining in the reign of death over the world. Moreover, the mystery religions had no concept of the faithful being incorporated into the god, as Christians are incorporated into the Mystical Body of Christ, despite Casel’s imagination. Instead, the “\textit{mystes}” are hopeful because they have seen that their god has been saved.

Thus, with the help of Louis Bouyer, it becomes clear that the Christian vision of sacrifice and worship is quite distinct from that of the Hellenistic religions. Though certain elements are notably similar between the two, that which marks the fundamental essence of Christian worship has no analog in the mystery religions. Casel asserted that the pagan consciousness provided a vocabulary with which the early Christians were able to articulate their concepts of worship. From where, then, if not the Gentile world, did Christians receive their way of thinking about liturgy and sacrifice?

Bouyer went on to explain that the Christian Mass emerged not from pagan sources, but from the Jewish Passover. Indeed, the Last Supper was a Passover meal\footnote{See Matthew 26:17, Mark 14:1-2, and Luke 22:8. For a recent harmonizing of the Synoptic Gospels with Saint John’s account, see Joseph Ratzinger, \textit{Jesus of Nazareth - Holy Week: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection} (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011).} (the word
“paschal,” as in the Paschal Mystery, is derived from the Hebrew and Aramaic words for “passing over”) and the Letter to the Hebrews framed the Christian understanding of Jesus’ sacrificial death around Jewish concepts.\(^{214}\) With respect to the Last Supper, the first Mass, Bouyer explained that,

\[F\]ar from creating a new rite, Jesus was only performing once again a thoroughly traditional rite of Judaism, while infusing into it a new meaning and a new reality. This fact… makes wholly useless the supposition of any fundamental influence of paganism on the Christian Mystery, and forces us to conceive the Mystery and the liturgy of which it is the living heart along purely Jewish lines.\(^{215}\)

Bouyer pointed out that the Christian sense of “mystery” around which Casel built his theology is not so much a feature of paganism as it is of Judaism. Even C.S. Lewis, whose work was used to supplement Casel in the previous chapter, pointed out that Christianity, though it emerged within a world dominated by pagan worship, received its own worldview from the Jewish mind. Indeed, he noted that “the Jews had, under divine tutelage, acquired a strong hostility to the mythic mentality dominating most ancient cultures.”\(^{216}\) Some of the earliest Christian thinkers were notably suspicious if not antagonistic to pagan religious sensibilities.\(^{217}\) Even if certain customs of the early Church—Casel, for instance, mentioned the anointing after baptism and the taking of milk and honey—were originally customs of pagan antiquity, one must nevertheless admit that the essential liturgical

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\(^{214}\) For a recent and comprehensive account of the Jewish influences on the Christian understanding of the Mass, see Brant Pitre, *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist: Unlocking the Secrets of the Last Supper* (New York: Doubleday, 2011).


\(^{216}\) Quoted in Bruce W. Young, “Lewis on the Gospels as True Myth” (lecture, Inklings Forever: Volume IV, Taylor University, Upland, IN, 2004). Lecture available at http://library.taylor.edu/dotAsset/5a009e17-201e-4206-89b4-52eadf3ecb9e.pdf.

emphases of sacrifice and resurrection were tied up in the historical fact of Christ’s own Death and Resurrection as well as typological re-readings of the Old Testament.

Even during Casel’s lifetime, D. Damase Winzen pointed out that “the world of the psalms was bound to the fundamental idea of mystery.”\(^{218}\) The earliest Christian use of the word “mystery,” moreover, comes from the First Letter to the Corinthians, where Saint Paul speaks of “God’s wisdom, mysterious, hidden, which God predetermined before all ages for our glory, and which none of the rulers of this age knew.”\(^{219}\) Paul linked this sense of mystery to wisdom and the revelation of that which is hidden, “two keynotes of a very Jewish tradition.”\(^{220}\)

Bouyer’s treatment of Casel on the mystery religions is now seen as a definitive refutation in the field of liturgical studies. As Edward J. Kilmartin, S.J. explained with a nod to Bouyer, “today there is a widespread consensus in scholarly circles that the usages in the messianic communities of Judaism, above all the Passover, supplied the principal sources of the original forms of liturgical expression in the Christian religion.”\(^{221}\) Nevertheless, by drawing out the parallel themes of death and resurrection between the Hellenistic cults and Christianity, Casel was able to put his finger on several insights into the universal sense of human religiosity. Hence, though Casel’s starting point must


\(^{219}\) 1 Corinthians 2:7-8.


\(^{221}\) Kilmartin, *The Eucharist in the West*, 279-280.
ultimately be rejected, even Bouyer could admit that the mystery religions “demonstrate how wonderfully human is the Christian Mystery, as well as how wonderfully divine.”

The Mysteriengegenwart Debate—The Substantial Presence the Paschal Mystery

Since this project investigates Casel’s Mystery Theology in order to reveal the liturgy’s role in evangelization, it is important to examine how his thought on the substantial presence of Christ’s Paschal Mystery in the liturgy coheres with the faith we seek to communicate and proclaim. Moreover, before utilizing his theology to articulate the sacramental encounter with Jesus, who is the way, the life, and the truth, we must determine if Casel’s assertions are in fact true. We have seen that, though Casel relies on questionable sources to arrive at his position on “mystery presence,” one can, as Bouyer bore witness, isolate his positions in order to determine if his more lasting contribution—the mysteriengegenwart—is to be retained. So where does Casel’s assertion fit into the Tradition? How has the Magisterium responded? Have Casel’s positions been well-received in Catholic circles?

The “mysteriengegenwart debate,” in John McKenna’s words, “is longstanding and well known.” In fact, Casel’s Mystery Theology provoked a spirited argument even within his own lifetime and was implicitly addressed by the papal Magisterium in Pius XII’s Mediator Dei. At the same time, many commentators argue that Sacrosanctum

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222 Bouyer, Liturgical Piety, 86.
Concilium is shot through with Casel’s ideas and several outstanding theologians have embraced his thinking.

Casel and the Magisterium

Casel claimed to have gleaned his position from the Sacred Scriptures and Church Fathers. Bearing in mind that the Church’s Magisterium is an essential source for Catholic theology, the third leg without which the stool of Scripture and Tradition would topple over, one must consult what the Magisterium has taught about the sacrifice of Christ in the Mass, and even the Magisterium’s direct response to Casel. As the Second Vatican Council’s Dei Verbum explains, “the task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ.” What, then, has the Magisterium had to say about mysteriengegenwart?

Casel and the Magisterium—The Council of Trent

During the Protestant Reformation, it was necessary for the Church to defend and more clearly articulate its position on the Mass as a sacrifice. The early Reformers challenged that, if Christ’s sacrifice was perfect and done “once for all,” there can be no way of talking about the Mass of today as a sacrifice. Martin Luther claimed that “if it were

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225 Dei Verbum §10: “Sacred tradition, Sacred Scripture and the teaching authority of the Church, in accord with God’s most wise design, are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others, and that all together and each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit contribute effectively to the salvation of souls.”

necessary to offer the mass as a sacrifice, then Christ’s institution of it was not complete.”227 The Council of Trent (1545-1563) rightly sought to address these challenges and represents a Magisterial synthesis of Church Tradition up to that point. Indeed, the Council explained “what the Catholic Church has always understood and taught,” namely, that

[Jesus], although He was about to offer Himself once on the altar of the cross unto God the Father, by means of His death, there to operate an external redemption; nevertheless, because that His priesthood was not to be extinguished by His death, in the last supper, … to the end that He might leave to His own beloved spouse the Church, a visible sacrifice, … whereby that bloody [sacrifice], once to be accomplished on the cross, might be represented, and the memory thereof remain even unto the end of the world, and its salutary virtue be applied unto the remission of those sins which we daily commit, declaring Himself constituted a priest forever, … He offered up to God the Father His own body and blood under the species of bread and wine.228

Thus the sacrifice of the Mass does not constitute another sacrifice, as the Reformers worried, but a representation of that one sacrifice. Nor is the Last Supper to be juxtaposed with Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross, but, instead, should be seen as Christ’s handing over to the Church His body “given for you”229 and His blood “shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins.”230 It is the same sacrifice.231

Of this immolation occurring at Mass, the Council went on: “The victim is one and the same, the same now offering by the ministry of priests, who then offered Himself on

230 Matthew 26:28.
the cross, the manner alone of offering being different. The fruits indeed of which oblation, of that bloody one, to wit, are most plentifully received through this bloodless one.”

Indeed, the substantial presence of Christ is affirmed, as one might expect, but does Trent affirm a substantial presence of the historical event? We will withhold our conclusion until the final chapter.

James T. O’Connor aptly summarized that “the decree of Trent on the Mass as a sacrifice… was content to formulate the common tradition…. Each Mass is itself a true sacrifice, a memorial sacrifice of the sacrifice of Christ. [Nevertheless] the Tridentine decree did not… resolve all the questions involved…. Passed over, [for instance,] were the more subtle discussions about the relation between the Supper, the Cross, and the Mass.”

*Casel and the Magisterium—Pope Pius XII’s Mediator Dei*

After the Council of Trent, the Magisterium said little with respect to the Mass as a sacrifice. Corresponding to the Liturgical Movement of the early 20th century, however, Pope Pius XII’s *Mediator Dei* represents one of the few Magisterial interventions into liturgical theology in recent times and, in Kilmartin’s estimation, “has become the standard position of subsequent papal documents.” Written in 1947, the document proved, for the most part, to be an emphatic endorsement of the Liturgical Movement. In Louis Bouyer’s description, “this document is… an index to the truths of lasting value which have been proposed by the contemporary liturgical movement…. Far from trying to propose new and

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232 The Council of Trent, *Session XXII*.
startling ideas of his own, the Pope has rather succeeded in giving to the whole Church the benefits of the greatest achievements of modern scholar research in liturgy."

Without question, as Kilmartin explained, “Mediator Dei was influenced significantly by Casel’s theology of mysteries, as well as by the literature which that theology occasioned.” Nevertheless, it remains to be seen if Pius affirmed Casel’s assertions or those of his critics. In fact, most of Casel’s detractors claim that the idea of “mystery presence” was implicitly condemned by the Pope. At the same time, published just before his death, Casel saw the encyclical as an endorsement of his thinking, even the unique assertions of mysteriengegenwart. So confident were Casel and his followers, they sought a confirmation of this endorsement from the Holy Office. Much to their disappointment, in the words of Aidan Nichols, “the Holy Office… very definitely fence-sat,” determining that more study would be necessary.

What, then, did Pius XII assert regarding the presence of the historical event in the Mass? To start, it might be helpful to note that in Mystici Corporis Christi, Pius pointed out that the Church’s dispensation of the sacraments is not somehow disconnected from the original historical event of Christ’s death on the Cross. Indeed, in Kilmartin’s words, “[Pius] bases the relation of the historical saving acts to the liturgy on the actual presence of Christ.” Moreover, in Mediator Dei itself, Pius reacted against the opinion “that

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235 Bouyer, Liturgical Piety, 36-37.
236 Kilmartin, The Eucharist in the West, 295.
240 Kilmartin, The Eucharist in the West, 295.
attention should be paid not to the historic Christ but to a ‘pneumatic’ or glorified Christ.”\textsuperscript{241} Pius further explained that “the august sacrifice of the altar… is no mere empty commemoration of the passion and death of Jesus Christ, but a true and proper act of sacrifice, whereby the High Priest by an unbloody immolation offers Himself a most acceptable victim to the Eternal Father, as He did upon the Cross.”\textsuperscript{242} With respect to \textit{mysteriengegenwart}, Bouyer pointed out that, in this latter statement, “Dom Casel, sometime before his death, acknowledged… the exact statement of the thought he wished to proclaim.”\textsuperscript{243}

Though Pius XII made use of many of Casel’s insights, even insights offered by the \textit{mysteriengegenwart}, many theologians feel that, as Kilmartin described, “in the matter of the relation between the historical saving acts and the Christian liturgy, [Pius] distances himself from Casel’s thesis.”\textsuperscript{244} In the notorious 165th paragraph, Pius taught that “these mysteries are ever present and active not in a vague and uncertain way as some modern writers hold [\textit{effutiunt} = “chatter”], but in the way that Catholic doctrine teaches us.”\textsuperscript{245} In what way, though, is that? Pius went on to affirm the typical scholastic synthesis: “according to the Doctors of the Church, [the mysteries] are shining examples of Christian perfection, as well as sources of divine grace, due to the merit and prayers of Christ; they still influence us because each mystery brings its own special grace for our salvation.”\textsuperscript{246}

\textsuperscript{241} Pius XII, encyclical letter \textit{Mediator Dei}, available at http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_20111947_mediator-dei.html, §162.
\textsuperscript{242} Pius XII, \textit{Mediator Dei}, §68.
\textsuperscript{243} Bouyer, \textit{Liturgical Piety}, 89.
\textsuperscript{244} Kilmartin, \textit{The Eucharist in the West}, 297.
\textsuperscript{245} Pius XII, \textit{Mediator Dei}, §165.
\textsuperscript{246} Pius XII, \textit{Mediator Dei}, §165.
In the final chapter, we will offer our own conclusions about the teaching of *Mediator Dei* and seek to offer a synthesis of the Magisterial texts and the insights of the *mysteriengegenwart* debate.

*Casel and the Magisterium—Sacrosanctum Concilium*

Bouyer argued that in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, one may find “a general declaration of what the Church... means by the liturgy” and that it “may well be considered as putting the stamp of the supreme authority in the Church upon the main results of the whole liturgical movement... [even if] Pius XII had already done something along these lines in... *Mediator Dei.*” More than that, several theologians have argued that the Second Vatican Council did endorse Casel’s positions. For instance, in Bouyer’s words, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* “leads to a view of Christ’s saving work, and... to an understanding of the whole Christian faith, which puts the entire emphasis not on some abstract notions, but on the living unity of a saving event, which has to become ours, through the Church, in her sacramentality.” This notion central to the work of Casel.

Strictly speaking, however, the Council followed Pius XII in his articulation of how Christ’s mysteries are made present in the Liturgy: “Recalling thus the mysteries of redemption, the Church opens to the faithful the riches of her Lord’s powers and merits, so

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that these are in some way made present for all time, and the faithful are enabled to lay
hold upon them and become filled with saving grace.”251 In merely stating that these
mysteries are made present “in some way,” the Council seems to leave room for further
exploration. Nevertheless, the document again highlights the traditional “effectus theory,”
that the Lord’s “powers and merits” are made present insofar as they allow the faithful to
“become filled with saving grace.”

Though the Council was certainly influenced by Casel’s Mystery Theology, even
his most adamant supporters refrain from calling the document a wholesale affirmation of
his theology. Bouyer, for example, could admit that “in [Sacrosanctum Concilium.] while
the Church endorses… and represents the best fruit of what has been achieved in the work
of pioneers like Dom Odo Casel,” nevertheless, one must refrain from asserting that “all
the details of what those religious thinkers produced are now canonized.” Moreover, “the
supreme authority in the Church has now distinguished, in the thinking of these pioneers,
the nucleus of indisputable truth from hypotheses or mere personal opinions.”252 Again, in
this chapter, we have sought only to outline the conversation which surrounds Casel’s

251 Pope Paul VI, Sacrosanctum Concilium, available at
http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-
ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html, §102.
252 Bouyer, Liturgical Piety, 11. It is unclear if Bouyer is here referring to Casel’s positions on the
Hellenistic cults or to every detail of the mysteriengegenwart as Casel articulated it. Since Bouyer seems to
follow Casel with respect to the substantial presence of Christ’s Passion in the sacraments, it is more likely
that Bouyer is referring to the mystery religions. Nevertheless, the principle which informs Bouyer’s
assertion is the same as my own—that the Council is in some sense acknowledging the “nucleus of
indisputable truth” in Casel’s theology. Where Bouyer chose to apply that principle to the Council’s
overlooking of Casel’s Hellenistic positions, I argue that the Council, by saying that Christ’s mysteries are
present “in some way,” chose to overlook the finer details of Casel’s mysteriengegenwart in order to affirm
a notion Casel rightly emphasized, a presence of Christ’s Passion in the traditional way that, as Pius XII put it,
“Catholic doctrine teaches.” I will return to this in the final chapter.
mysteriengegenwart. We withhold our synthesis and conclusion regarding what the Magisterium teaches and the conversation of Catholic theologians until the final chapter.

Casel and the Magisterium—The Catechism of the Catholic Church

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, flowing out of the Second Vatican Council, followed closely the tenor of thought exemplified in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and, in Fr. John Saward’s estimation, “gave Christ’s faithful the most detailed exposition of [the continued efficacy of Christ’s mysteries] ever found in a document of the Holy See.” For instance, paragraph 518 explained that “Christ’s whole life is a mystery of recapitulation. All Jesus did, said, and suffered had for its aim restoring fallen man to his original vocation.” Moreover, “Christ enables us to live in him all that he himself lived, and he lives it in us.” Thus, real contact with the historical mysteries of Christ’s life is available in the Church. For the Catechism, this contact takes place within the Augustinian framework of incorporation into Christ’s mystical body: “We are called only to become one with him, for he enables us as the members of his Body to share in what he lived for us in his flesh as our model.”

Further on, the *Catechism* gave a more detailed teaching with respect to the presence of historical events in the liturgy:

In the liturgy… it is principally his own Paschal mystery that Christ signifies and makes present…. His Paschal mystery is a real event that occurred in our history,

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255 CCC, 518.
256 CCC, 521.
257 CCC, 521.
but it is unique: all other historical events happen once, and then they pass away, swallowed up in the past. The Paschal mystery of Christ, by contrast, cannot remain only in the past, because by his death he destroyed death, and all that Christ is—all that he did and suffered for all men—participates in the divine eternity, and so transcends all times while being made present in them all. The event of the Cross and Resurrection abides and draws everything toward life.\textsuperscript{258}

At first glance, the Catechism appears to affirm Casel’s assertions in full. Does the text not say that the Passion was a “unique event of history which does not pass away,” an event which “cannot remain only in the past”? The question, however, is not whether Christ’s Passion is present—as we will see, on either side of the debate, theologians are willing to admit that the historical events are present \textit{in some way}. The question is whether Christ’s Passion is \textit{substantially} present. Is the historical substance of the liturgy, even if the accidents remain those of the spatio-temporal reality of the local parish, the “once for all” \textit{transitus Domini}?  

Thankfully, the Catechism offered further clarification by noting that “the Eucharist… re-presents (makes present) the sacrifice of the cross, because it is its memorial and because it applies its fruit.”\textsuperscript{259} Should one ask how the Mass memorializes the sacrifice of the Cross, the Catechism explained that

In the sense of Sacred Scripture the memorial is not merely the recollection of past events but the proclamation of the mighty works wrought by God for men. In the liturgical celebration of these events, they become in a certain way present and real… In the New Testament, the memorial takes on new meaning. When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, she commemorates Christ’s Passover, and it is made present: the sacrifice Christ offered once for all on the cross remains ever present. [And, quoting \textit{Lumen Gentium},] “as often as the sacrifice of the Cross by which ‘Christ our Pasch has been sacrificed’ is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried out.”\textsuperscript{260}
Thus, the Mass is a memorial and the events are “in a certain way present,” in that it proclaims “the mighty works wrought by God for men” and, in it, “the work of our redemption is carried out.” While Casel’s immense influence on this passage is evident, here, again, the Magisterium made the traditional “effectus theory” its own and avoided making a clear affirmation of the full peculiarities of Casel’s “mystery presence,” as the passage’s choice of the ambiguous phrase “in a certain way” indicates.

_Casel and the Magisterium—Conclusion_

As we have noted throughout our outline of the Magisterial texts, our synthesis and conclusion regarding the Church’s teaching is withheld until the final chapter. Nevertheless, for our purposes, it is important to set before us these key texts which act as authoritative sources for the theologians engaged in the _mysteriengegenwart_ debate.

_Casel and Catholic Theology_

Contemporary with Casel, Viktor Warnach and Eugene Masure agreed with his ideas and tried to bring more precision to the doctrine, while Karl Adam heavily criticized his work and Gottlieb Söhngen is numbered “among the most outstanding opponents of the teaching.”Moreover, as we will see, the debate continues among contemporary Catholic theologians—though they do not necessarily address or respond to each other—and, since our project seeks to understand the liturgy’s evangelistic potential within the context of the

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modern world, we will explore the debate as it exists today, among theologians who—though a few have died—theologize within our unique historical framework.

Casel’s Supporters

During his lifetime, Casel obtained many followers, especially among his fellow Benedictines in the School of Maria Laach. Many of his contemporaries, both liturgists and theologians, attempted to deepen and clarify his concepts and determine the lasting value of his insights. Beyond his own lifetime and even into the present day, Casel’s work has been praised and defended by theologians of the highest caliber. Two in particular, Charles Cardinal Journet (d. 1975) and Monsignor Robert Sokolowski, will help us both bring more precision to Casel’s idea of “mystery presence” and make a case for his continued importance in liturgical-sacramental theology, with a particular eye to evangelization.

Casel’s Supporters—Charles Cardinal Journet

Cardinal Journet brought Casel’s thinking into the post-conciliar era. Early in his treatment of the topic, he laid out what he saw as the rub of the question:

At the Mass, recalls the Council of Trent, there is… under the species of the unbloody sacrifice, the same Victim as on the Cross. Is it not also the same sacrificial act as on the Cross? In other words, does the unity of the Mass and the Cross result from the one identity in both places of Priest and Victim? Or is there between the Mass and the Cross a numerical unity of the sacrifice, of the sacrificial redemptive act?262

In answering this question, Journet revealed a closeness to Casel, but articulated a more precise position. Following Anscar Vonier (as Casel did),263 Journet used the Last

263 Anscar Vonier, A Key to the Doctrine of the Eucharist (Bethesda, MD: Zaccheus Press, 2003), 93.
Supper—the first Mass—as his starting point. How is it that the Last Supper can be an authentic sacrifice if Christ had not yet been sacrificed on the Cross? Indeed, in Journet’s words, “if the one redemptive sacrifice is actually taking place when Jesus institutes the Last Supper, it is the one redemptive sacrifice which will be present under the sacramental species.”

Thus, in turn, underneath the “sacramental species” of one’s local parish—one’s everyday spatio-temporal experience—is the invisible Calvary, the one transitus Domini.

Journet felt that failure to see this point ran parallel to the Protestant discomfort with repeated sacrifices. Just as Protestants essentially ignore the puzzle of the Last Supper—which, since Christ spoke of his body given and blood out-poured, cannot be ignored—by juxtaposing the Cross with the Supper, so any refusal to admit a full presence of the historical event at Mass falls into this same false juxtaposition:

There are not two sacrifices juxtaposed at the Last Supper, but two distinct presences of one unique sacrifice: on one hand a presence under its natural bloody appearances; on the other hand a presence under its sacramental unbloody appearances. Under these two presences, one manifest, the other secret, the redemptive sacrifice is numerically one, identical.

Thus Journet affirmed with Casel a sacramental presence of the one event and powerfully affirms numerical identity of historical events. Does this amount to a substantial presence, as Casel articulated?

Journet, without explicitly backing away from the fullness of the mysteriengegenwart position, brought a more precise articulation of the doctrine. For

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Journet, Christ—the Priest and Victim—is substantially present. At the same time, the event, to use a more precise term, is *operatively* present: “there is for the contemporary faithful, in addition to the substantial presence of Christ, the *operative presence of the one redemptive sacrifice*: this is precisely the time when that sacrificial act which redeems the world is accomplished in its transitory reality.”\(^{266}\) So what is meant by an operative presence? Journet explained that

> Insofar as He immediately sustains in existence the substantial being of things by a conserving action, which is a continuation of His creative action, God is present to these things by His essence, by *His substance*. Insofar as He grants to things not only their being but also their action as secondary causes and all that is real in their action, God is present to them by *His power, by His strength* [operatively].\(^{267}\)

In the Gospels, this distinction was displayed when Christ was substantially present in the house of Simon the Pharisee\(^{268}\) and was operatively or efficiently present in the house of the centurion\(^{269}\) in curing his servant without physically entering the building.\(^{270}\) Christ is present in both houses, but in different ways.

Moreover, Journet explained that an important distinction must be made. In his system, substantiality does not apply to acts or events: “When it is a question not of a substance but of an act, the operative presence is the only thing which can be the cause.”\(^{271}\) Thus it seems that, for Journet, operative presence is the dynamic equivalent of substantial presence. Where people (or other things) can be substantially present, acts can only be operatively present. This is the fullest possible presence. Thus, in the Mass, Christ the

\(^{268}\) Luke 7:36-50.
Priest and Victim is substantially present and his sacrifice on Calvary is operatively present.

Casel’s Supporters—Monsignor Robert Sokolowski

Contemporary theologian Msgr. Robert Sokolowski has attempted to bring philosophical precision to Casel’s *mysteriengegenwart*. Over the course of his career, Sokolowski has articulated a theology which relies on the philosophical system of phenomenology, what he calls a “theology of disclosure.” While he has written extensively on the Eucharist and on the topic at hand, one must dive into the fundamentals of his philosophy to see how he justified Casel’s position.

To start, Sokolowski enumerates a central tenet of phenomenology. In perceiving something, the fact that some things are present necessitates that certain other things must be absent—seeing the front of a book, for instance, demands that one cannot see the back. Sokolowski applies this principle to the memory. In remembering some event of the past, one is in contact with the identity of that event, an aspect of it—that aspect which is “remembered”—which was not originally experienced:

[R]emembering provides another set of appearances, another manifold through which one and the same object is given to us. Memory involves a much more radical kind of absence than does the co-presenting of absent sides [of, say, a book] during perception, but it still presents the same object. It presents that same object but with a new noematic layer: as remembered, as past.

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273 See Robert Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). In particular see the chapters on “Perception, Memory, and Imagination” (66-76) and “Temporality” (130-145).


Sokolowski also explained that this encounter with a past event does more than just exercise the imagination or call images to mind. For the phenomenologist, perceptions are stored and the memory calls up these perceptions of a past event in such a way as to make them current realities: “we bring it to life again.... we are engaged in what happened then.” 276 Thus, through the memory, the self is not limited to one’s current spatio-temporal context: “I am not confined to the here and now; I can not only refer to the past… but I can also live in it through memory.” 277 Sokolowski refers to this concept as a “displacement of the self” and, we will see, utilizes it to articulate how the Paschal Mystery might be present in the Mass.

Sokolowski later discusses the nature of temporality and, in so doing, reveals even more philosophical possibilities with respect to Casel’s position. To start, Sokolowski outlines two distinct levels of time: world/transcendent/objective time and internal/immanent/subjective time. 278 Objective time, the time of clocks and calendars, seems to be more basic than subjective time, which is the duration and sequence of mental acts and experiences. Sokolowski, however, claims that this is not the case. Since, in subjective time, one has the ability to relive events through the memory, as recounted above, objective time actually becomes subordinate to subjective time:

As a phenomenon… objective time is dependent on immanent (subjective) time.... Worldly things can be measured by clocks and calendars, and can be experienced as enduring, only because we experience a succession of mental activities on our

276 Sokolowski, Introduction to Phenomenology, 68, 71.
277 Sokolowski, Introduction to Phenomenology, 70.
278 Sokolowski, Introduction to Phenomenology, 130-131. As a matter of fact, Sokolowski articulates a third level of time, consciousness of internal time. For our purposes, though, only the first two distinctions are important.
subjective life. If we did not anticipate and remember, we could not organize the processes that occur in the world into temporal patterns.\textsuperscript{279}

Thus, for Sokolowski, the subjective ordering of events within the perceptive person stands as the ultimate organizing principle of temporality. Applied to the Mass, then, the temporality of the Paschal Mystery, which is an eternal event, can be recalled in the collective memory of the Church and so undercut all metaphysical historicity arguments. This elaboration upon the original \textit{mysteriengegenwart} position conforms nicely with Casel’s own conception of memorial, as summarized by Rose Beal: “memorial is not what is remembered, but that which is made present by word and action through the act of remembering.”\textsuperscript{280}

From this base, Sokolowski goes on to more clearly articulate the position as applied to the Eucharist. Linking his argument with the fact of transubstantiation, he suggests that “we cannot have one without the other: no Transubstantiation without identity of sacrifice, and no identity of sacrifice without Transubstantiation.”\textsuperscript{281} Moreover, Sokolowski seeks to localize the substance\textsuperscript{282} of this event around the Mass’s Eucharistic Prayer. As the sequence of the Eucharistic Prayer unfolds, the narrative changes outlined for the priest reveal the place wherein the spatio-temporal mystery is realized:

\begin{quote}
[I]n these words the priest speaks no longer simply in the name of the Church, but in the name of Christ, in the person of Christ. Both grammatically and spiritually, he speaks in the person of Christ. To put it another way, he now lets Christ become the speaker and the agent. He lets Christ take over the action that is being performed. At this central part of its most central action, the Church recedes and no
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{279} Sokolowski, \textit{Introduction to Phenomenology}, 132.
\textsuperscript{281} Sokolowski, \textit{Christian Faith & Human Understanding}, 97.
\textsuperscript{282} Sokolowski does not buy into Journet’s assertion that events cannot have substance. Sokolowski remarked in \textit{Christian Faith & Human Understanding} that “[the] saving event of the Death and Resurrection of Christ… is the substance of the eucharistic celebration” (69).
longer speaks in her own name; she lets Christ take over and accomplish what he accomplished at the Last Supper. She lets him do whatever he did there, by simply allowing him to speak in his name, not her own. It is by virtue of the literary form of a quotation that the Church allows Christ palpably to take control of her liturgy.  

Since this project seeks to investigate the mysteriengegenwart with respect to its potential for the New Evangelization, we must point out that Sokolowski even argues that his Eucharistic theology of disclosure offers a more convincing picture of the Mass for our modern context. He notes that while “our remarks do not counteract anything in patristic or scholastic theology, … they do add a dimension that may have been underplayed in them, one that is especially appropriate for theology in the cultural situation in which it finds itself now.” Thus, in Sokolowski’s opinion, Casel’s “mystery presence,” when read through the lens of phenomenology, and insofar as it sets out an ontological and evangelistic liturgiology, offers the most helpful approach to sacraments for the New Evangelization.

Casel’s Critics

Casel’s Mystery Theology was resisted in many theological circles, even from its earliest days. Karl Adam and Gottlieb Söhngen represent just two of his more prominent early critics, but, as James O’Connor summarized, “most theologians have found [Casel’s] specifics difficult to accept.” In our own assessment, we will examine the most common critique of Casel’s mysteriengegenwart, that of the Thomists, in the work of Colman

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283 Sokolowski, Christian Faith & Human Understanding, 83.
284 Sokolowski, Christian Faith & Human Understanding, 84.
O’Neill, O.P.\textsuperscript{286} (d. 1987), Edward Schillebeeckx, O.P.\textsuperscript{287} (d. 2009), and contemporary British theologian Fr. John Saward.\textsuperscript{288}

\textit{Casel’s Critics—The Thomists}

Fr. John Saward asserted that, though Casel’s Mystery Theology was “brilliant in its intuitions,” it was nevertheless “controversial [and]... muddled in its metaphysics.”\textsuperscript{289} Indeed, in whole, Saward found Casel’s assertions fundamentally incompatible with a Catholic conception of the sacraments. “Thank God,” he concluded, “the Church does not depend for the exposition of Christ’s mysteries on the insights of her theologians, however learned and pious.”\textsuperscript{290}

Saward set up his treatment of the topic by affirming traditional Scholastic teaching: “the Triune God, as principal efficient cause, sanctifies us through the instrumentality of [Christ’s] assumed nature, in which all the human actions and sufferings of the Son of God took place.” Yet, uncovering the question at the heart of the \textit{mysteriengegenwart} debate, he asked: “but does He sanctify us through the instrumentality of those actions and sufferings as taking place or as having taken place?”\textsuperscript{291}

Seeking to answer that question, Edward Schillebeeckx voiced the most obvious philosophical objection shared by the Thomists to Casel’s theology:

[T]ime itself is irreversible. Whatever is historically past cannot now, in any way at all, be made once more actually present, not even by God himself, not even ‘in

\textsuperscript{287} See Edward Schillebeeckx, \textit{Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God} (Lanham, MD: Sheed & Ward, 1963), 54-63.
\textsuperscript{288} See Saward, \textit{Cradle of Redeeming Love}, 47-120.
\textsuperscript{289} Saward, \textit{Cradle of Redeeming Love}, 67.
\textsuperscript{290} Saward, \textit{Cradle of Redeeming Love}, 67.
\textsuperscript{291} Saward, \textit{Cradle of Redeeming Love}, 91.
mystery.’ Whatever has already happened in history is irrevocably past and done. A fact historically past cannot therefore be actualized anew mystically or in the sacrament.292

Casel’s response to this objection was particularly disappointing. He simply complained that the “difficulty is ill-conceived, because the presence here brought to be is not a natural and historical, but sacramental one.”293 As Kilmartin explained, for Casel, “metaphysical hypotheses concerning the impossibility of a renewal of historical acts… simply do not apply.”294

Schillebeeckx attacked this reply, explaining that since the sacraments are made for and take place within the created world, with its spatio-temporal nature, one cannot dismiss the necessary metaphysical questions the sacraments bring up. Schillebeeckx even asserted that Casel’s position, and his avoidance of effectively addressing philosophical objections, actually devolves into a form of Christological heresy:

If God truly became man, then necessarily the sacrifice of the Cross in its historical manifestation is reality belonging to the past and cannot be actualized anew in sacrament. The historicity of the man Jesus and of his human acts of redemption shares inevitably in the irrevocability of temporal events. Should we wish to maintain the contrary, we would support a new form of Docetism; we should deny the genuine historicity of Jesus’ existence as man.295

For Schillebeeckx, then, the impulse to lift Christ’s historical acts out of created reality misconstrues the Incarnation and distorts the fundamentals of Christian faith.

Colman O’Neill offered another criticism of Casel’s Mystery Theology. Attempting to synthesize several articulations of the “mystery presence” position, he

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292 Schillebeeckx, Christ the Sacrament, 55.
294 Kilmartin, The Eucharist in the West, 270.
295 Schillebeeckx, Christ the Sacrament, 56.
presented the argument as a syllogism: “The sacraments… give reality to what they signify; but they signify the death and resurrection of Christ; therefore the death and resurrection… are made sacramentally but really present in the Mass.”\textsuperscript{296} O’Neill saw that this “expert piece of theological sleight-of-hand [that] has dazzled many a poetically-inclined student of theology”\textsuperscript{297} misconstrues how the sacraments give reality to what they signify. Traditionally, the sacraments are thought to make real what they signify only with respect to the effects produced within the Church. As Saint Augustine explained, “the actions… pass away, but their efficacy remains the same, and the spiritual gift thus communicated is eternal.”\textsuperscript{298} Thus, O’Neill concluded, “[the Eucharist] realizes within the Church not the historical event of Calvary but Christ’s sacrificial offering of his body and blood in view of associating the faithful with the sacrifice.”\textsuperscript{299}

At the same time, the Thomists addressed Casel’s concerns by highlighting that Christ’s actions had eternal implications. In Schillebeeckx’s words,

[T]he historical redemptive acts of Christ, which as historical are irrevocably past, are personal acts of God the Son… in [them], there already was an element of something perennial; an enduring trans-historical element which now becomes sacramentalized in an earthly event of our own time in a visible act of the Church.... Since the sacrifice of the Cross and all the mysteries of the life of Christ are personal acts of God, they are eternally actual and enduring. God the Son himself is therefore present in these human acts in a manner that transcends time.\textsuperscript{300}

\textsuperscript{296} O’Neill, \textit{Meeting Christ in the Sacraments}, 86.
\textsuperscript{297} O’Neill, \textit{Meeting Christ in the Sacraments}, 86.
\textsuperscript{299} O’Neill, \textit{Meeting Christ in the Sacraments}, 87.
\textsuperscript{300} Schillebeeckx, \textit{Christ the Sacrament}, 55.
Saward, too, noted that “from the beginning, the saints, both the unlettered and the learned, have regarded the mysteries of the life of Jesus as fathomless stores of truth and grace, somehow ever present and active in the liturgy of the Church.”

So how are these mysteries “ever present and active in the liturgy?” To articulate this, Saward relied on an Augustinian approach—we participate in Christ’s mysteries insofar as we are incorporated into Christ’s mystical body: “Christ and his Church are together like one flesh, one person, one man, one Son. Therefore, what the members endure, the Head, for their salvation, makes His own, and all that He is and does in the flesh He communicates to them as a grace.” From here, Saward went on to enumerate the traditional scholastic synthesis—the “effectus theory.” In this theory, one must distinguish between Christ’s acts in themselves and the virtues that result therefrom: “[T]he event in its historical circumstances, is a thing that passes away, but… the virtue, is a reality that abides forever.” In Saint Thomas’s words, “Christ’s passion and death are not to be repeated, yet the virtue of that Victim endures for ever.”

But how are those virtues present in the liturgy? For Saward, it is the enduring presence of Christ at the right hand of the Father which perpetuates these virtues through the ages. Since Christ’s body is eternally present to the Father, the mysteries lived out in that body are present as well. The Letter to the Hebrews, wherein it is revealed that “when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of

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301 Saward, *Cradle of Redeeming Love*, 53.
302 Saward, *Cradle of Redeeming Love*, 55.
303 Saward, *Cradle of Redeeming Love*, 92.
304 Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III.22.5.2.
God,“305 has been a rich source for delineating the traditional “effectus theory.” Offering “not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood,”306 Christ, not from “a sanctuary made with hands, but [from] heaven itself, now… appear[s] in the presence of God on our behalf.”307 Again, in her Dialogue, Saint Catherine of Siena heard the voice of the Father: “[The saints] exult in His wounds, which have remained fresh, and the Scars in His Body are preserved, and continually cry for mercy for you, to Me, the Supreme and Eternal Father.”308 Even more, Saward asserts with Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle (d. 1629) that “if our Lord can take the wounds of his body into glory, He can also ‘preserve something in His soul’” as well.309 Thus, the whole Christ continually presents his “once for all” sacrifice to the Father, and so “since they are everlastingly present in the sight of God, the mysteries can be everlastingly effective in the salvation of men.”310

*Casel’s Critics—Conclusion*

Thus, for the Thomists, Casel’s inability to answer philosophical objections regarding the non-repeatability of historical events (as well as the scent of Docetism that accompanies such an assertion) has rendered his mysteriengegenwart untenable. Still, his critics have attempted to offer alternative solutions in order to appease his concerns.

Moving into the final chapter, we now synthesize the critique of Casel’s

305 Hebrews 10:12.
306 Hebrews 9:12.
310 Saward, *Cradle of Redeeming Love*, 95.
mysteriengegenwart with the emphases of his supporters and the teaching of the Magisterium in order to offer a kerygmatic understanding of the liturgy for the New Evangelization.
CHAPTER 4: TOWARD A KERYGMATIC UNDERSTANDING OF THE LITURGY

The Magisterial Texts

In the previous chapter, we highlighted the important role of the Church’s Magisterium in determining the validity and usefulness of Casel’s *mysteriengegenwart*. What conclusions can be drawn from our analysis of the Magisterial texts?

*The Privileged Place of the “Effectus Theory”*

What, if anything, did the Council of Trent have to say about the presence of the historical event of Christ’s sacrifice? Even before the Council, Cardinal Cajetan, in a text that immensely influenced the fathers of Trent and undergirded their decree, taught that “when one refers the sacrifice of the altar to the death of Christ, a sign is involved and not the reality, since neither the death of Christ nor Christ in death is present in itself. Since Christ lives and reigns in heaven, his death is consequently not contained in the sacrifice but is rather signified.”311 This is not a denial of Christ’s real presence in the Eucharist—the distinction is essential. Cajetan elaborated: “Two things must be rightly understood: [in

the Mass,] Christ himself is both signified and contained, while his death is indeed signified but not contained.”

The text of the Council itself, in explaining that Christ instituted the Mass at the Last Supper so that His sacrifice “might be represented, and [so] the memory thereof might remain,” seems to reflect little more than the standard scholastic way of speaking about how Christ’s Passion is represented in the Mass—the “effectus theory.” Saint Bede the Venerable’s (d. 735) position that Christ preserved the wounds of His Passion “so that as a suppliant before the Father for us, He may show for all eternity the kind of death He underwent for the life of man,” influenced all treatments of the topic even into the Middle Ages. Saint Thomas Aquinas, following Bede, exemplifies the scholastic articulation of representation: Our Lord “makes intercession by making present [repraesentando] in the sight of the Father the humanity assumed for us and the mysteries celebrated [past tense] in that humanity.” Thus, for the scholastics, whose theology the Council of Trent seems to follow, the historical event of Christ’s Passion is represented insofar as Christ, who is outside of time, continually presents the wounds of His one sacrifice to the Father.

Can Casel’s substantial presence of the historical events be found, even in seed, within the Tridentine decree? It seems not. As James O’Connor explained, “it was clear to

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312 Cajetan, Cajetan Responds, 169.
the theologians and bishops that the Mass is a sacramental or symbolic reenactment of the Cross. It is not a *re-presentation*; it is rather a representing of the sacrifice of the Cross.\footnote{James T. O’Connor, *The Hidden Manna* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 228.}

After the Council of Trent, the Magisterium, while offering much clarification on this sacramental representation, never departs from the Tridentine explanation. _Mediator Dei_ offered the most timely and explicit Magisterial response to Casel’s _mysteriengengenwart_. While the text relied heavily on certain elements of Mystery Theology, nevertheless, as Edward Kilmartin described, “in the matter of the relation between the historical saving acts and the Christian liturgy, [Pius] distances himself from Casel’s thesis.”\footnote{Edward J. Kilmartin, *The Eucharist in the West*, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 297.} Indeed, referring to Casel directly, Pius explained that “these mysteries are ever present and active not in a vague and uncertain way as some modern writers hold, but in the way that Catholic doctrine teaches us.”\footnote{Pope Pius XII, _Mediator Dei_, §165.} Notice that, in his wording, there exists already in Catholic doctrine some relevant teaching on the matter. One may safely assume that the Pope had the scholastic “*effectus* theory,” enshrined by the Council of Trent, in mind. Indeed, _Mediator Dei_ seems to affirm the traditional “*effectus* theory” in identifying Christ’s historical mysteries as “sources of divine grace, due to the merit and prayers of Christ; they still influence us because each mystery brings its own special grace for our salvation.”\footnote{Pius XII, _Mediator Dei_, §165.}

Though, as seen in the previous chapter, Louis Bouyer and other theologians convincingly drew out Casel’s influence on Vatican II’s *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, it is
difficult to assert that the Council affirms the substantial presence of historical events in the liturgy. Though the Council follows Mediator Dei in acknowledging, in the words of Josef Jungmann, S.J., “that what is involved in [the] commemoration of past events [in the Mass] is not merely the past but rather a kind of past which is present,” it nonetheless refrains from asserting that the past is substantially present. Jungmann went on: “A simple affirmation [of Casel’s position] is avoided.... Furthermore, [the text] denotes more the effect of the saving event than the event itself.” Hence, in Sacrosanctum Concilium, the “effectus theory” again appeared as the privileged position.

Lastly, the Catechism of the Catholic Church followed both Pius XII and Sacrosanctum Concilium in affirming that Christ’s historical mysteries are present “in a certain way.” While the text made very strong affirmations that Christ’s Paschal Mystery “cannot remain only in the past,” the Catechism explained that historical events are present in the Mass inasmuch as it proclaims “the mighty works wrought by God for men” and, in it, “the work of our redemption is carried out.” Thus, the Catechism too avoids the fullness of Casel’s mysteriengegenwart.

From the Council of Trent to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, a constant teaching is evident. At Trent, the typical scholastic synthesis, the so-called “effectus theory,” was enshrined within the Church’s teaching. In response to the

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323 CCC, §1085.
324 CCC, §1363.
325 CCC, §1364.
mysteriengegenwart conversation, Mediator Dei reaffirmed the presence of Christ’s historical mysteries “in the way that Catholic doctrine teaches us.”\(^{326}\) Even more, the Second Vatican Council and the Catechism of the Catholic Church follow closely the teaching of Pius XII and reiterate that the Church’s liturgy “opens up to the faithful the riches of [the] Lord’s powers and merits.”\(^{327}\) All the way down, the Church has affirmed the scholastic formula.

The Magisterially Affirmed, Central Insight of Casel’s Mysteriengegenwart

After the Council of Trent, and in response to mysteriengegenwart, the Magisterium repeatedly affirmed that the mysteries of Christ’s life are in some way present in the liturgy. Without endorsing the fullness of Casel’s thinking, the Magisterium has recognized some kernel of truth in his work. In my judgment, to understand how mysteriengegenwart coheres with the Church’s Magisterium and is useful for a renewed understanding of the liturgical encounter with Christ, one must distinguish between his central insight and its peripheral particularities. In this reading, what is central to Casel’s mysteriengegenwart is the assertion that the historical event of Christ’s Death and Resurrection is present in the Mass in some way.\(^{328}\) This assertion, broadly conceived, is unambiguously affirmed in Pius XII’s Mediator Dei and is presupposed in Sacrosanctum Concilium and in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

\(^{326}\) Pope Pius XII, Mediator Dei, §165.


\(^{328}\) Casel’s writings were always criticized for being vague and imprecise. This is perhaps why he so eagerly saw an affirmation of his position in Mediator Dei.
At the same time, the Magisterium utilized language that left the precise formulation of this position undetermined—hence the repeated partial affirmation that these mysteries are present, “in some way”\textsuperscript{329} or “in a certain way.”\textsuperscript{330} More than that, \textit{Mediator Dei} rejected what I call the peripheral particularities of Casel’s \textit{mysteriengegenwart}, namely, that the historical events are present \textit{substantially}\.\textsuperscript{331} Though the Pope acknowledged Casel’s central insight that the events are in some way present, he rejected Casel’s own attempt to articulate \textit{how} they are present.\textsuperscript{332} With \textit{Mediator Dei}, then, we can safely reject the \textit{particularities} of Casel’s thinking while, at the same time, affirming his central insight. Moreover, bearing in mind Pius’ counsel that “if the Supreme Pontiffs in their [encyclicals] purposely pass judgment on a matter up to that time under dispute, it is obvious that that matter… cannot be any longer considered a question open to discussion among theologians,”\textsuperscript{333} we may safely conclude that while his central insight is important and true, the particulars of Casel’s position are problematic and untenable.

\textbf{Assessing the Contribution of Catholic Theologians}

\textsuperscript{329} \textit{Sacrosanctum Concilium}, §102.
\textsuperscript{330} \textit{CCC}, §1363.
\textsuperscript{331} Of course, Casel did not see his unique assertion, that the events are present substantially, as peripheral but as central to what the Mass really means. In the same way that Casel saw the Hellenistic mystery religions as the indispensable starting point of his whole theology and yet we were able to assess his \textit{mysteriengegenwart} position apart from them, so, in the same way, we are able to isolate his important emphasis and, historically speaking, timely insight (that the Paschal Mystery is present \textit{in some way}) apart from his more specific conclusions (that the Paschal Mystery is present \textit{substantially}).
\textsuperscript{332} There are two “\textit{how}?” questions at play here. (1) Is the Paschal Mystery present \textit{in some way}?” Casel (and the Magisterium) answer “yes.” The question follows: how is the Paschal Mystery present? To this question Casel answers, “substantially.” (2) To this affirmation, that the Paschal Mystery is present \textit{substantially}, a second question arises: “how can a historical event be \textit{substantially} present?” This second “\textit{how}?” question, as Louis Bouyer pointed out, Casel refused to answer. Nevertheless, my assertion is that Casel’s answer to the first “\textit{how}?” question is untenable in light of the Magisterial texts.
\textsuperscript{333} Pope Pius XII, \textit{Humani Generis}, available at http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_12081950_humani-generis.html, §20.
The mysteriengegenwart debate among Catholic theologians helped to reveal the true and helpful insights of Casel’s broad assertion—that the Paschal Mystery is somehow present in the liturgy—as well as the limitations of his particular solution. His supporters attempted to offer more clarity and precision and, in so doing, helped to reconcile his thinking with the perennial teaching of the Church. Nevertheless, Casel’s detractors offered a biting philosophical critique which, for the most part, has been dodged and unanswered.

The philosophical objection articulated by most Catholic theologians and exemplified by Edward Schillebeeckx’s pithy claim that “time itself is irreversible” was met with dismissal by the majority of Casel’s defenders. Casel himself complained that the “difficulty is ill-conceived,” asserting that, as Kilmartin summarized, “metaphysical hypotheses… simply do not apply.” For Casel, sacramental presence is not subject to the philosophical constraints of this world. This dismissal has made it difficult for the majority of Catholic theologians to take Casel’s position seriously. Are not the sacraments precisely the Church’s dispensation of divine grace according to our earthly and bodily natures? How, then, could metaphysical considerations, which refer to the earthly existence of human beings, simply not apply?

Robert Sokolowski and The Theology of Disclosure

Realizing the need to offer a more robust philosophical account of Casel’s assertions, Robert Sokolowski, as we saw in the previous chapter, utilized phenomenology

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to more clearly articulate the position by way of a “theology of disclosure.” Sokolowski’s explanation of how the Cross is made present relies on his general philosophy of memory and temporality. In this system, perceptions are relived through the memory in a way that makes them substantially present. Thus, the memory of the collective Church recalls its original perceptions and makes the historical event of the Cross substantially present at Mass.

In this system, though, the sacrifice of Christ is little more than any other temporal event. While Sokolowski affirms that the Cross “touched eternity as did no other event in history,” it is unclear how his philosophical system makes this possible. Indeed, the philosophy of temporality with which he justifies Casel’s theory downgrades the Cross to an act just like any other. The sacrifice of Christ is re-actualized in the same way a trip to the grocery store might be re-actualized: through the memory. Yes, the memory of the Church re-actualizes the sacrifice of Calvary within the sacramental world, but it remains unclear how, in Sokolowski’s view, the historical mysteries of Christ are anything more than the typical day-to-day events of human existence.

Since Sokolowski’s philosophy does not seem to offer a convincing solution to the problem, I am inclined to make the Thomist objection my own. Even if the sacramental world operates with supernatural integrity, their purpose as instruments of grace for earthly and bodily creatures demands that metaphysical considerations, be they historical or

spatial, do in fact apply. Anything else, as Schillebeeckx pointed out, would be a form of Docetism, as if Christ did not really enter into human history.

_Presence by Faith_

At the same time, it is possible to take the Thomist objection too far in refusing to admit any presence of the historical event in the Mass. Realizing this, Colman O’Neill attempted to articulate a presence that coheres with the traditional “effectus theory,” an alternative solution to Casel’s _mysteriengegenwart_. As O’Neill explained, “it would be to miss the richness of sacramental symbolism if it were to be restricted to signification of the effect.”

This symbolic richness is revealed in the capacity of the sacraments to awaken religious sensibilities in the faithful churchgoer. Hence “the vaguely-formulated sense aroused in the recipient of being plunged into the death of Christ and of rising with him from the grave” offers some form of participation in the one-time historical event of the Cross and Resurrection. For O’Neill, it is not some vague sacramental world, but the realm of personal faith that grants one contact with the historical mysteries of Christ’s life:

Faith of its nature, is indifferent to the passage of time; it can attain the historical mysteries of Christ in all their actuality as they existed two thousand years ago and can reach forward to the return of Christ at the end of the present world. It can make these mysteries present today as objects of thought and love. It can give life to the formalized symbolism of liturgical action so that the descent of a catechumen into the font—or even the pouring of water on his head—can re-present the mysteries of Christ.

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Participation in Christ’s historical Paschal Mystery is offered through one’s subjective faith in that event as well as faith in the sacrament’s ability to dispense its effects. Speaking in particular of baptism, O’Neill claimed that “by faith… the catechumen performs the symbolic evocation of Christ’s death and resurrection not as an actor in a passion play, concerned with recalling the historical event [substantially], but as one being involved in the event in so far as it concerns himself. It is precisely the passion-as-applied to an individual that is made present in baptism and the other sacraments by the faith of the Church.” Thus, though O’Neill rejects Casel’s substantial presence of the historical event, he nonetheless affirms a real presence through faith.

What does this mean in terms of the liturgy’s kerygmatic-evangelistic potential? In O’Neill’s system, is the historical event only present for the person who already has faith? Is the event only present for this person or that person? Is there no objective presence apart from the faith of the subjective believer? What about the Christian who is struggling with involuntary doubts? If we bear in mind the disciples on the road to Emmaus, whose “eyes were kept from recognizing him,” we are tempted to explore this issue further. Though the disciples heard stories of the empty tomb, when the risen Christ drew near “they stood still, looking sad”—they did not believe. It was only after Jesus “took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them… [that] their eyes were opened and they recognized him.” In the breaking of the bread, the disciples recognized the Risen Christ;

341 O’Neill, Meeting Christ in the Sacraments, 92.
they saw the Crucified One alive again. In that moment, what Jesus “interpreted to them in all the scriptures... concerning himself,”\(^{345}\) in particular the necessity “that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory,”\(^{346}\) registered in the minds of the disciples. Part of what “was known to them in the breaking of the bread”\(^{347}\) was the revealed axis around which the world turns—the *transitus Domini*: “Did not our hearts burn within us while... he opened to us the scriptures?”\(^{348}\) Read liturgically, the account reveals some objective content to the Eucharistic meal. Even apart from the personal presence of the Risen Christ, which no one disputes is also substantially present in the liturgy, the Emmaus meal relies on something other than the faith of the disciples—at this point, they had no faith. How, then, bearing in mind O’Neill’s position that one’s personal faith might constitute a real presence of historical events in the Mass, might one account for what is revealed in the Emmaus story?

We may be able to enlarge our use of faith with respect to this phenomenon. Is it possible that the faith of another may stand in place for the one who is without faith? Though the Emmaus disciples were without faith in the Risen Christ who stood before them, the first witnesses of the empty tomb were full of faith: “some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his body; and they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive.”\(^{349}\) Is it possible that, in the same way that the faith of the family stands in place of

\(^{345}\) Luke 24:27.  
\(^{347}\) Luke 24:35.  
the baptized infant,\textsuperscript{350} so the faith of the close friend or even the Church at large may stand in place for those at Mass who are without faith or suffering through involuntary doubts? In this way, an objective presence of the historical event, apart from the subjective faith of each particular believer, might be possible without asserting Casel’s substantial presence.

Operative Presence

A. Charles Journet

In my assessment, the clearest and most helpful explanation of Casel’s \textit{mysteriengegenwart} is found in the work of Charles Journet. Coupled with our adapted version of O’Neill’s solution of presence through faith, Journet’s articulation of an operative form of presence completes my own speculative solution. Journet’s important contribution is revealed in his refusal to describe this sacramental presence of the historical event as a \textit{substantial} presence. In the previous chapter, we saw that for Journet, substantiality is not a category that applies to acts or events—substantial presence of an event is an unrealizable fiction. This is why, in an appendix to his book on the Mass, Journet outlined posited solutions to this problem of historical presence and, though he seemed to favor Casel’s followers, he drew a sharp distinction in his own position.\textsuperscript{351} Instead of substantial presence, Journet explained that the Cross is present operatively or efficaciously. The coherence of this position with the traditional \textit{“effectus” theory} should


\textsuperscript{351} Charles Journet, \textit{The Mass: The Presence of the Sacrifice of the Cross} (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2008), 249-267.
be at once apparent. Journet’s operative presence refers to how “that sacrificial act which redeems the world is accomplished in its transitory reality,” how that one sacrificial act is applied here and now, and how the effects of that sacrifice are dispensed through all times. This distinction makes Journet Casel’s only supporter to adequately address the Thomist objection. Indeed, his refusal to describe this presence as substantial reveals that Journet made the Thomist objection his own and, at the same time, brought greater clarity to why the fullness of Casel’s position is essentially untenable.

At the same time, as we noted previously, Journet considers operative presence to be the dynamic equivalent of substantial presence. Events do not have substance, but they can impose their effects upon reality. Hence, though Journet departs from the precise articulation of Casel’s position, he still seeks to describe this presence in the fullest possible way:

[W]hen it is a question not of a substance but of an act, the operative presence is the only thing which can be the cause.... One could say that, just as each consecrated host is substantially Christ because it multiplies the real substantial presences of the one Christ, so proportionately each Mass is a true and real sacrifice because it multiplies the real operative presences of the unique redemptive sacrifice.

B. Potential Objections

Anticipating a certain objection, one might suppose that the same criticism I have levelled at Sokolowski, namely, his way of describing the presence of past events, downgrades the Cross to an event just like any other. Are not all past events, in some way, operatively present to the current world? The difference lies in the unique effects which

are, in this case, operatively present. For example, the event of a student’s procrastination is operatively present in the urgency with which he or she now seeks catch up, but is not necessarily present to the organized classmate who finished the homework in advance. The Paschal Mystery, however, is operatively present to all people at all times, “because by his death he destroyed death, and all that Christ is… participates in the divine eternity, and so transcends all times while being made present in them all.”

An objector may further reply that Christ’s Paschal Mystery is operatively present at all times and places. Can we not encounter Christ’s operative presence outside of Mass? In a sense, this is true; after Christ’s redemptive work, the fundamental relation between God and humanity is altered and thus His acts are, in this sense, always operatively present. However, the operative presence Journet described refers to the explicit dispensation of Christ’s work of redemption. Real contact with Christ is accessible outside of the sacraments, but when the Church gathers to carry out Jesus’s command to celebrate the Mass in memory of Him, this *anamnesis* initiates a more explicit contact with the Paschal Mystery. The sacraments are instrumental causes of grace in a way that everyday life is not.

In response to both of these objections, it might be helpful to distinguish between weak/remote and strong/proximate forms of operative presence. At all times and in all places, Christ’s redemptive work has a weak or remote operative presence insofar as the

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354 CCC, 1085.
post-lapsarian distance that separates humankind from God has been bridged. The Paschal Mystery is, in this sense, weakly or proximately present always and everywhere. But, on account of the Church’s liturgical *anamnesis* of the Holy Spirit, the sacraments proper offer special and explicit encounters with the operative presence of the Paschal Mystery. In this case, the Paschal Mystery’s operative presence can be described as strong or proximate.

C. *Emmaus*

Does the Emmaus story cohere with this operative form of presence or with the scholastic “effectus theory?” To start, we should note that, although the biblical text offers little insight into how the historical Paschal Mystery is present, it remains compatible with our proposed solution. A central element of the Emmaus story, for instance, is Christ’s opening of the Scriptures wherein He explained the necessity of His suffering so as to enter into glory. Christ must first undergo the mysteries of His humanity, in particular His Passion, before presenting His sacrificial wounds to the Father. Notice that Jesus chided Cleopas and the other disciple for being “slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.”

Jesus, “beginning with Moses and all the prophets… interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself,” in particular “that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory.”

Josef Jungmann expounded:

> [W]hat was His remedy for the dullness of faith of these disciples? A vital understanding of the Scriptures as they unfolded His role of Suffering Servant in the Father’s merciful plan of salvation. And the result? Their hearts were aflame

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with a joyous, enthusiastic faith that leapt into action and enkindled the spirits of others.\footnote{Josef Jungmann, \textit{The Good News Yesterday and Today}, tr. William Huesman (New York: W.H. Sadlier Inc., 1962), 5.}

The content of Christ’s teaching here, made clear when He reiterates the message moments later to the remaining disciples,\footnote{Luke 24:44-47.} centers around bringing salvation history to completion—emphasis is on the redemption Christ has effected. The Old Covenant sacrifices, which prefigured Him, are brought to perfection in his one sacrifice on the Cross. Since Christ’s message revolves around the effects of His sacrifice with respect to the unfolding of salvation history, it is no stretch to assert that, knowing this event is present \textit{in some way}, this presence refers to the unfolding or application of those effects. Thus, the presence of the \textit{transitus Domini} appears in the Emmaus scene to be an efficacious or operative presence, wherein the effects of Christ’s redemptive mission are applied and operating.

\textit{Conclusions Regarding the Mysteriengegenwart Debate}

In my assessment of the Magisterial texts regarding the sacrifice of the Mass, I determined that the \textit{“effectus theory”} holds a privileged place within the Catholic doctrinal tradition. Following Saint Bede the Venerable as well as Saint Paul, Catholic doctrine has historically affirmed that the one sacrifice of Christ is present in the Mass insofar as the wound-bearing Son of God, seated at the right hand of the Father, continually and ever-presently (since this takes place outside of time) presents the intercessory wounds of human redemption to the Father. Moreover, the effects of that “once for all” act are dispensed in

the sacraments. In response to Casel’s unique assertions, the Magisterium, in my estimation, has affirmed his central insight—the historical event of the Cross is present *in some way*—but rejected his particular way of articulating that presence, namely, that the event is present *substantially*. As Cardinal Journet pointed out, substance does not refer to historical events.

Since, the Magisterium has affirmed that the historical events are present *in some way*, how might we explain this presence? Following and expanding upon Colman O’Neill, I sought to show that historical events can be present through faith. This can happen both subjectively, as the churchgoer is plunged by faith into the Paschal Mystery, and objectively, as the collective faith of the Church stands in place for those without faith. Thus, real contact with the event of the Cross is possible at Mass. Even more, following Cardinal Journet, we may describe this presence of historical events as an operative presence—indeed, a strong or proximate form of operative presence—which is the categorical equivalent to substantial presence when it comes to acts and events, and a form of presence that intelligibly coheres with the “*effectus* theory.”

**Mysteriengegenwart and Kerygma**

The time has come to synthesize the importance of Casel’s work and the *mysteriengegenwart* debate it occasioned with the goals of this thesis. As the first chapter indicated, this project seeks to investigate Casel’s Mystery Theology with respect to the liturgy’s kerygmatic-evangelistic potential. What kind of encounter with the Risen Christ does the liturgy offer the contemporary churchgoer? What does Casel’s work offer in our attempt to articulate a kerygmatic understanding of the liturgy?
The Roses of Saint Therese

Because we retain the central emphasis of Casel’s Mystery Theology, a real encounter with the Risen Christ, one that mirrors what is retold in the biblical Emmaus passage,\(^{362}\) is available in the liturgy. Moreover, though we reject Casel’s particular conclusion that the Paschal Mystery is substantially present, we conclude that Christ’s Cross and Resurrection are nonetheless operatively present.

Is this conclusion disappointing? Does an operative form of presence satisfy with respect to the weight we have placed on the liturgy? To demonstrate the value of an operative form of presence, it might be helpful to draw a parallel. At the end of her life, Saint Therese of Lisieux comforted her grieving Carmelite sisters: “Oh! No, you will see…it will be like a shower of roses. After my death, you will go to the mail box, and you will find many consolations.”\(^{363}\) We ourselves, in light of our Resurrection faith, find some comfort in meditating on the role our lost loved ones may play in our future sanctification. The dead are no longer physically or substantially present to us on this earth. Nevertheless, one might argue that, in the light of faith and by participating in the Communion of Saints, the Mystical Body of Christ, the dead are actually more present to us after their deaths. Indeed, since their presence to us is an intercessory one—an operative form of presence—we may begin to see how this principle applies to the liturgy. In the same way that Saint Therese is more efficaciously present to her Carmelite sisters (and to all those devoted to her) in heaven than on earth, so the operative, efficacious presence of Christ’s death—the

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constant offering of His wounds before the Father—may be a more intimate kind of presence than some “vague and uncertain” substantial presence. Note, again, that we refer to presence of the event of the Paschal Mystery; we leave untouched the doctrine of Christ’s substantial presence in the transubstantiated Eucharist. Of course, Casel might have admitted this point, and may have held that both operative and substantial presences were at work in the Mass. But, bearing in mind the criticisms we have outlined, especially those of Cardinal Journet, one may be satisfied with holding only the richer of the two presences, the operative presence of the Cross at Mass.

Sacramental Ontology

We have not yet revealed the importance of Casel’s Mystery Theology in light of modern sacramental theology. Indeed, certain deficiencies in post-conciliar theology offer to the modern world a picture of the sacraments lacking in evangelistic potential. Where does the problem lie? Following the assessment of Aidan Nichols, O.P., we see that “what has gone wrong in English-speaking sacramental theology is, it would seem, a flight… from that notion of the unique and uniquely sacred ontology of the sacramental Liturgy.”364 Without endorsing the fullness of his position, we can assert that Casel’s Mystery Theology offers a helpful remedy to this problem.

Stressing “less crucial” aspects of the Second Vatican Council’s Constitution on the Liturgy, post-conciliar sacramental theology has overemphasized the Mass’s symbolic

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elements: “By and large, the sacraments are treated as symbols which have a power to focus the lessons of Christian experience—or simply of human experience as such—in a fashion that lends itself to the furtherance of God’s plan for humankind.” For example, in order to articulate an immediate sense of God’s presence in everyday life, Karl Rahner worked to blur the distinction between the sacramental and non-sacramental realms. Following this line of thought, in subsequent years, Michael Taylor asserted that, after the Incarnation and Atonement, “grace happens wherever human life is lived and celebrated authentically”—a notion that can “reduce Christian sacramentalism to a humanism.”

In the work of Joseph Martos, where a sense of the sacred is retained, the content of the sacraments is outlined in terms of universal symbolic expressions. Hence, for Martos, if the symbolic elements of the seven sacraments are ineffective in leading one to the sacred, an ongoing redesign of the Church’s sacramental system is warranted.

Even more, Nichols points out that coupled with this blurring of the sacred and the non-sacred is an interpretation of the liturgy wherein the Mass is seen as either the summation or prefigurement of one’s everyday experiences. Hence, Tad Guzie defined a sacrament as “a festive action in which Christians assemble to celebrate their lived

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365 Nichols held that “[t]he reasons for, or causes of, this flight are various: among them the near-collapse of Christian metaphysics and the characteristic recourse of our culture to psychology and sociology for the understanding of reality. But a deficient liturgical practice, mostly abusive of the intentions of the liturgical reformers of the 1960s and 1970s—but sometimes taking its cue from weaknesses in their work—must also figure prominently on any such list” (168).


experience and to call to heart their common story.” More than that, Guzie moves away from any interpretation of sacramental causality that reaches beyond the realm of communal consciousness or anthropological symbols: “A sacrament is a symbol of God’s care for us in Christ. Enacting the symbol brings us closer to one another in the Church [and] to the Lord who is there for us.” Adapting this impulse, certain strands of liberation theology have understood the sacraments, in Juan Luis Segundo’s words, as “a rhythmic, dialectical dimension of societal and historical activity. It is the community’s way of reactivating and deepening our interpretation of, and commitment to, the historical process geared toward man’s liberation.” In this reading, the sacraments are “signs of future blessings—certainly not found in the Liturgy here and now or in ritual at any time—to which engagement by faith in liberationist praxis directs us.”

Other post-conciliar theologians like Bernard Cooke have chosen to emphasize not the communal or public element of the sacraments, but the subjective experience of personal relations. Indeed, for Cooke, the small-scale relations of friendship—the “most basic sacrament of God’s saving presence”—are so predominant that “marriage, rather than the Holy Eucharist or Baptism, is the fundamental sacrament in the Church.” Other thinkers like David Power describe the sacramental liturgy as “an action wherein the testimony of God is heard and appropriated, the experience of the community is

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transformed, and a godly presence disclosed.”\textsuperscript{377} Though this definition, unlike that of Guzie and others, may offer an encounter with the Triune God, it nevertheless exemplifies the post-conciliar “tendency to avoid the language of intrinsic sacramental efficacy… and, with this, to suppress any suggestion that there is a distinct sacramental ontology which raises the common being we experience in the created order… to a new intensity.”\textsuperscript{378}

All of these sacramental trends indicate that a comprehensive departure from the notion of sacramental ontology, a movement diametrically opposed to the impulses of Casel’s Mystery Theology, has taken place in post-conciliar theology. With this departure, a fundamental element of the Church’s sacramental teaching has been, at best, underemphasized and, at worst, disregarded. In my opinion, without endorsing all of Casel’s positions, sacramental theology would be aided by renewed attention to Casel’s assertion that the historical event of Christ’s Paschal Mystery is in some way present in the liturgy. Moreover, as Nichols went on to explain regarding post-conciliar sacramental theology,

[These] definition[s] of what the Liturgy is can only strike us, in comparison with the work, above all, of Casel, but also, for that matter, of all the Catholic theologians who were his inter-war contemporaries, as remarkably weak on the question of divine prevenience, the priority in the sacred Liturgy of God’s initiative—which is what makes the Liturgy ‘sacred,’ makes it a moment or series of moments in which we ourselves are sought out by the God of salvation and find the divine life, righteousness and peace bestowed upon us.\textsuperscript{379}

Simply put, post-conciliar overemphasis on the symbolic element of the sacraments, while offering a picture of the liturgy which is intelligible to the modern churchgoer, “[fails] to nourish at depth precisely because the deep being of the Liturgy, that sacred ontology in whose exploration Casel spent his energies, [is not] respected.”380 As we have seen from the Emmaus story and the Magisterial texts, the Mass offers real evangelistic contact with and participation in the historical Paschal Mystery; the event is, in some way, present at Mass. This ontological presence does far more than simply point to something outside of the sacraments proper (as modern sacramental theology has tended to assert). For Casel, the sacraments in themselves offer intimate contact with the life-changing event of the *transitus Domini*. If the liturgy is to offer a kerygmatic encounter with the Risen Lord, a renewed emphasis on sacramental ontology is necessary, and Casel’s Mystery Theology aids in this endeavor.

**Conclusion**

Thus we arrive at the end of our study of Dom Odo Casel’s Mystery Theology. Though we ultimately reject his assertion that the Paschal Mystery is *substantially* present in the liturgy, we endorse its operative presence, a dynamic equivalent. One may ask, why does this matter? What difference does it make if the Paschal Mystery is substantially present or operatively present, especially since we know that, however the event is present, it is present in a way that impels toward evangelization? Does this not satisfy our concerns with respect to the New Evangelization? Our recent look at current trends in sacramental

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theology helps answer this question. Though, as we noted, Casel’s emphases appear in the
text of Sacrosanctum Concilium, his influence has waned in recent years. As pointed out
in our assessment of his theology, the majority of Catholic theologians have found his
assertions difficult, if not untenable. While, in my opinion, modern theologians were right
to reject the fullness of Casel’s mysteriengegenwart position—that the historical events are
substantially present—his central emphasis that the event is in some way present has been,
unjustly dismissed in much post-conciliar sacramental theology. Because Casel’s
mysteriengegenwart startled so many theologians, it was disregarded and, as we have seen,
sacramental theology suffered. Thus, determining with more clarity how we can understand
and speak about “mystery presence” helps to reestablish a principle of Christian worship
that has been missed in the modern way of thinking about or practicing the liturgy. A
retrieval of Casel’s theology, one that rightly understands his emphases and refuses to
throw the baby out with the bath water, offers a helpful antidote to certain weaknesses in
contemporary sacramental and liturgical theology. Most importantly, it helps to forward a
kerygmatic liturgiology for the New Evangelization. For this reason we strove to clarify
Casel’s assertion, and now achieve goal of the thesis.
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