Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi:

The Theological Significance of Eucharistic Prayer IV

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Every religious missionary would have to grapple with these questions, "How do theological truths learned in the study of theology sound in the ears of Christians who have never studied theology but have lived the mystery of the faith in their life?" and "How is our theological language received by people who are alienated or new to the Christian faith?" There seems to be a missing link between the truths reflected and spoken upon in theological studies and their concrete expressions in the lives of many people, which can only be bridged by language and experience. Taking this problem into account, the author attempts to deepen the understanding of *lex orandi, lex credendi,* by theologizing the fourth Eucharistic Prayer (EP) in an effort to narrow the gap between theology and the experience of faith.

The axiom, *lex orandi, lex credendi*, attributed to Prosper of Aquitaine (5th c.), points to a deep relationship between the experience of worship and the truths of faith that the worshipping community upholds. In this paper, three attempts would be made: 1) to define *lex orandi, lex credendi,* 2) to discuss its implications, and 3) to propose a systematic theology of the liturgy which affirms its nature as the work and participation in the life of the Holy Trinity.[1] Liturgical theology as a "theology of the Trinity" becomes important in searching for

1 Cf. Edward J. Kilmartin S.J., *Christian Liturgy* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1988).

how the liturgical experience becomes an immersion in the "central mystery of the Christian life and faith."[2] Dubbed as the prayer that is "at the heart of the Liturgy of the Eucharist,"[3] the EP shall be examined for its implications to theological anthropology, soteriology, and ecclesiology.

Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi

The last chapter of Luke's gospel recounts the story of Jesus journeying with the disciples to Emmaus. The One who had been walking with them all along was made known to them (ἐγνώσθη αὐτοῖς - cf. Lk 24:35) in the breaking of the bread. The space where the bread was broken becomes the space of intuition and faith. The breaking of the bread is the *kerygma* given to the community of disciples. Thus, the revelatory nature of this gesture is a hermeneutic to understand the well-known and frequently misinterpreted *lex orandi, lex credendi*.

While liturgical prayers are "evocative, poetic and symbolic" expressions of the mystery of faith (*ars*), theological treatises, by nature, are closer to scientific expositions (*scientia*).[4] However, this does not mean that liturgical prayer is not theological but rather, it "reflects the faith of the Church."[5] Thus, the theology of the Eucharist must not be prescinded from the mystery of faith because faith and the Eucharist are

2 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Manila: Word & Life Publications, 1997), no. 234.

3 International Commission on English in the Liturgy Corporation, *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, https://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/GIRM/Documents/GIRM.pdf, no. 30.

4 Paul de Clerck, "Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi: Sens Original et Avatars Historiques d'un Adage équivoque," Questions Liturgiques 59 (1978): 211.

5 Hector Scerri, "The Fourth Eucharistic Prayer: A General Analysis of its Structure and Content to appreciate its Ecclesiological Meaning," *Melita Theologica* 51:1 (2000), 23.

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rooted in the same saving event: "Christ's gift of Himself in the Paschal Mystery."[6] Hence, the axiom *lex orandi, lex credendi* is an invitation to consider liturgy as a "theological locus" and an expression of the *sensus ecclesiae*.[7]

Irenaeus tells us that "our doctrine agrees with the Eucharist, and the Eucharist confirms the doctrine."[8] Scholastic theology holds that the liturgy of the Church is a "first theology," affirming the intrinsic bond between the Church's prayer and her beliefs.[9] If the Eucharist is the fullest manifestation of the Church's *lex orandi* (*SC* 1), it is also a manifestation of the Church's *lex credendi*. In the various mystagogical treatises of the Church Fathers, one discerns an effort to communicate the meaning of the liturgy as a pathway to enter into and understand the mystery of faith. Taking these into account, the author proposes a systematic theology of the liturgy that demonstrates liturgy "as a transparency for the mystery of salvation."[10] Only then can one consider how liturgy serves as a language and experience that communicates the truths of faith.

The Eucharist as the Work of and Participation in the Trinity

The mystery of the Holy Trinity is foundational to any attempt at articulating a theology of the Eucharist. Edward

6 Pope Benedict XVI, *Post-Synodal Exhortation Sacramentum Caritatis*, 22 February 2007, Vatican Archive, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20070222_sacramentum-caritatis.html (accessed October 17, 2017), no. 34.
7 Paul de Clerck, "Lex orandi, lex credendi," 192-93.
8 Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adversus Haereses*, 4: 18:5 (PG 7: 1028).
9 John D. Laurance S.J., *The Sacrament of the Eucharist* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 44-45.
10 Ibid., 98.

Kilmartin's theology of the liturgy involves approaching the Trinity as a "grounding of symbol"[11] for the Eucharist. As the work of the Trinity, there can be "no Christian prayer without the action of the Holy Spirit, who unites the whole Church and leads it through the Son to the Father."[12] What the community celebrates and believes is made possible by the gift of faith, in communion with the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit.[13]

A systematic approach to Trinitarian theology thereby views liturgy as the "place where the economic Trinity unfolds itself."[14] Kilmartin describes the liturgical life of the Church, especially the Eucharist, as a "real symbol" of the economy of salvation, completely embodying the reality it signifies. As a "real symbol," Christian worship is understood as the "self-communication of the Trinity," inherently part of the plan of God revealed "by the Holy Spirit" (Eph 3:5).

One begins from the *perichoresis* within the immanent Trinity. The fulfillment of the dynamic of self-giving love within the three Divine Persons overflows into the economy of salvation or God's self-communication. A return to the Father completes this economy. The Spirit, who is the Love between the Father and the Son, is the "power of life." The mission of the Son and Spirit in the world reaches fulfillment in the kenotic movement of the Incarnation, which leads to complete self-offering (cf. Heb 9:14). The Lord is now a "vivifying Spirit" (1Cor 15:45) for humanity through the resurrection. He has become the Giver of life (cf. Jn 5:21).

11 Kilmartin, *Christian Liturgy*, 107.
12 Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, *General Instruction on the Liturgy of the Hours*, in *Documents on the Liturgy*, https://www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Rites/GILH.pdf (accessed October 17, 2017), no. 8.
13 Cf. Kilmartin, *Christian Liturgy*, 102.
14 Ibid., 181.

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By giving them the Father's Spirit, the Son loves the Father just as the Father loves His children. The epicletic moment of Pentecost is the constitution of the *ekklesia* that loves the Father "in Spirit and truth." (Jn 4:24). This *ekklesia* lives according to the kenotic pattern set by the Son who constituted it. The space in which *kenosis* becomes possible is the earthly liturgy celebrated by the Church. God's beloved are called to live a kenotic life, "in love to the Father *and* to the Father's other children."[15] Therefore, the fundamental orientation of the Church in prayer is a kenotic love in the image of the Son, moved and inspired by the Spirit. By receiving the symbols of bread and wide that the Spirit sanctifies, the community commits to live in the kenotic way of life, "dying to self, in order to rise in glory."[16]

As the "center and high point" of the Eucharist, the EP is the "great creed" that proclaims and makes present the "salvation, deification, and membership as sons [and daughters] that Christ himself gained for humanity."[17] In this paper, we shall look in particular at EP4, which has been described by some as the "most theological" amongst all the Eps,[18] being Johannine in its theology and the most Trinitarian due to the influence of Eastern theology. Therefore, we shall harness this potential by going deeper into the theology expressed by EP4 and how it makes *lex orandi, lex credendi* visible.

15 Kilmartin, *Christian Liturgy*, 102.
16 Ibid., 192.
17 Cf. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no. 78; Raymond Moloney S.J., *Our Eucharistic Prayers in Worship, Preaching and Study* in *Theology and Life Series,* vol. 14 (Delaware: Michael Grazier, 1985), 58; Yves M.J. Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit: The Holy Spirit in the Economy*, vol. 3, trans. David Smith (New York: Seabury Press, 1983), 229.
18 Enrico Mazza, *The Eucharistic Prayers of the Roman Rite* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1986), 157.

The Anthropological Dimension in EP4

Every EP starts with a preface that praises God for his greatness. It is the heart of the Eucharist because it embodies thanksgiving that is "a profession of faith…a place of justification."[19] Below is the preface of EP4:

> It is truly right, holy Father, that we should thank you, truly just that we should glorify you, for you are the one God, living and true…You who alone are good and the source of all life have made all things that you might fill your creatures with your blessings and give joy to many of them with the brilliance of your light.[20]

The prayer is addressed to God the Father as the Source of all being (cf. Eph 3:14-15). The central word in this opening doxological line is "holy." The Johannine roots of EP4 is discernible in how holiness is here understood (cf. Jn 17:11). Holiness is not an attribute of God among others but "the very essence of the Godhead."[21] Holiness marks and sanctifies the believers to be God's adoptive children. From a theologico-anthropological perspective, EP4 roots the identity of those who pray to the Father in a "filial life and communion with the Father."[22] Those who are baptized as God's children are formed after the image of the Incarnate Son. As "synthesis interpreters and priests" of the created world, human beings lend a voice to the created order so that the Creator and Source of all goodness can be praised and glorified. God has given personhood to humanity (understood as communion) that can

19 Mazza, *The Eucharistic Prayers of the Roman Rite*, 159.
20 All excerpts from the EP4 are taken from the original Latin translation provided by Enrico Mazza in his *The Eucharistic Prayers of the Roman Rite*.
21 Mazza, *The Eucharistic Prayers of the Roman Rite*, 160.
22 Ibid.

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"recapitulate creation…which originates from the communion of otherness in the Trinity."[23]

The Soteriological Dimension in EP4

The *anamnesis* of EP4 goes through the entire salvation history. The economic mission of the Son is seen as its culmination. EP4 borrows the Johannine vision of God's saving action springing from and being directed to love (cf. Jn 3:16). The soteriological vision of God's love is friendship which began in the act of creation, but which humanity abandoned in favor of death. In his grace, God wants to restore that friendship and bring it to completion:

> You made human beings in your image and entrusted the world to their care so that, serving you alone, their Creator, they might rule over all creatures. And when through disobedience they had lost their friendship, you did not abandon them to the power of death. In your mercy, you came to the aid of all of them, so that they might seek and find you.

Salvation takes its most definitive form in the person of the Son. The Son is both the "Only-begotten" in relation to the Father, and the "Savior" in relation to humanity.[24] The fullness of this economy within the anamnetic narrative culminates in the paschal mystery. As the "sacrament of memory" and the banquet set by the Son for His Bride, the Church, the Eucharist manifests what was made possible by the earthly mission of the Son. This anamnetic moment

23 Yik-Pui Au here refers to John Zizioulas' liturgical theology, that is also grounded in theology of the Trinity. Cf. Yik-Pui Au, *The Eucharist as a Countercultural Liturgy: An Examination of the Theologies of Henri de Lubac, John Zizioulas, and Miroslav Volf* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2017), 59.

24 Mazza, *The Eucharistic Prayers of the Roman Rite*, 167.

brings into reality the perfect love of the Son for the Father that has become kenotic for us.

This love thus operates a new orientation in the celebrating community: "that we might live no longer for ourselves but for him who died and rose for us." God's Kingdom manifests the love of the Father for the Son, the Son's love for the Father, and their gift of mutual love through the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn 17:23, 26). For Alexander Schemann, the joy of the Christian faith and experience resides in the fact that "that which is limited (humanity), has its origin in God who is complete, and in relation to Him, humanity is able to witness to Him, reflect His light, and act through his grace."[25] The *anamnesis* does not simply remember the last supper as to make present the sacrifice of the cross but brings out the quality of making present the original plan of creation. The entire earthly life of the Son is understood in the *anamnesis* as a total gift of self. The words of Isaac the Syrian resonate well with the soteriology expressed in EP4:

And why was he stretched out on the cross for the sake of sinners, handing over his sacred body to suffering on behalf of the world? I myself say that God did all this for no other reason than to make known to the world the love that he has, his aim being that we, as a result of our greater love arising from an awareness of this, might be captivated by his love when he provided the occasion of this manifestation of the Kingdom of heaven's mighty power - which consists in love - by means of the death of his Son.[26]

25 Cf. Alexander Schmemann, *L'Eucaristia, Sacramento del Regno* (Bose: Qiqajon, 2005), 29

26 Cf. Hilarion Alfeyev, "The Spiritual Word of Isaac the Syrian," *Cistercian Studies* 175 (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 2000). Quoted in Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, http://orthodoxeurope.org/

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The Ecclesiological Dimension in EP4

Every EP has an *epiclesis,* or a prayer addressed to the Father that He may send down the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is introduced as the One who will bring to completion the work of the Son. This resonates with the Johannine passages where Jesus promises to send his disciples "another Advocate," whom the Father will send in His name (cf. Jn 14:15-ff). In EP4, the Son is said to have sent the Spirit "from you, Father, as the first fruits for believers, who would finish his work in the world and bring holiness to completion." Thus, in EP4, the theology of the paschal mystery outlined in the *anamnesis* is "inflected in a pneumatological direction… giving a global vision of the entire economy."[27]

In EP4, one finds two inseparable epicletic prayers. The first is an invocation to the Father that the Spirit may sanctify the gifts of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. The second is a parallel invocation that the community "gathered into one body by the Holy Spirit…may truly become a living sacrifice in Christ to the praise of your glory." The Holy Spirit is both the One who brought about the Incarnation of the Word ("having taken flesh by the Holy Spirit") and the One whom the Father sent to constitute the Body of Christ.[28] By the power of the Spirit, the Church comes to exist as the Body of Christ through the salvific realities of the Word and the Bread.[29] In the image of the Son, the Church becomes a "living sacrifice in Christ to the praise of your glory." The Eucharist forms a community that has unity as its *sine qua*

print/11/1/16.aspx (accessed October 17, 2017).

27 Mazza, *The Eucharistic Prayers of the Roman Rite*, 168.

28 Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 230.

29 Cf. Chito Arevalo, "L'Eucharistie et l'Église," http://www.clerus.org/clerus/dati/2002-03/25-999999/06SAIIFR.html (accessed October 17, 2017).

non because it is founded upon and oriented towards the *communio* of the Trinitarian God.

Conclusion: The Eucharistic Prayer as an Evangelizing Exposition of the Faith

This paper followed Edward Kilmartin's thesis that liturgical theology is to be grounded in a theology of the Trinity. Liturgy can express the theological truths of faith because it is both the work of the Trinity and participation in the *communio* that is the Trinity. Three central moments of EP4 are identified to delve into the theological significance of the prayer: the preface, the anamnesis, and the epiclesis. Each of these moments unravels the anthropological, soteriological, and ecclesiological dimensions rooted in the work of the three Divine Persons.

As a missionary called to serve the Christian community in the name of Jesus the good shepherd to his pilgrim Church, we see the potential of liturgical language as an effective means of evangelization. The Son invites his Bride to His Father's banquet. In turn, He invites the Church to make the liturgical space wide open for the world. In the Eucharist, the Church witnesses God who "destroys death forever… and who wipes away the tears from every face" (Isaiah 25:8). The liturgical experience does not remove the Church from the world. Instead, the experience of the Eucharist becomes "the symbolic representation and realization of salvation history…a real event whenever men and women of goodwill respond responsibly to claims made upon them to act in accord with their human dignity."[30]

30 Kilmartin, *Christian Liturgy*, 88.

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