

HOW THE  
EUCCHARIST  
CAN SAVE CIVILIZATION



HOW THE  
EUCCHARIST  
CAN SAVE CIVILIZATION

R. JARED STAUDT, PHD

TAN Books  
Gastonia, North Carolina

*How the Eucharist Can Save Civilization* © 2023 R. Jared Staudt.  
All rights reserved.

With the exception of short excerpts used in critical review, no part of this work may be reproduced, transmitted, or stored in any form whatsoever, without the prior written permission of the publisher. Creation, exploitation and distribution of any unauthorized editions of this work, in any format in existence now or in the future—including but not limited to text, audio, and video—is prohibited without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Excerpts from the English translation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* for use in the United States of America © 1994, United States Catholic Conference, Inc.—Libreria Editrice Vaticana. Used with permission.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible: Catholic Edition, copyright © 1965, 1966 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Cover design by Jordan Avery

Cover image: Jules Breton, *The Blessing of the Wheat in Artois*, 1857, oil on canvas / [commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org).

Interior images: *Sacrament of the Last Supper* © 2022 Salvador Dalí, Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, Artists Rights Society (p. 272). All other interior images are public domain.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2022945125

ISBN: 978-1-5051-2820-8

Kindle ISBN: 978-1-5051-2821-5

ePUB ISBN: 978-1-5051-2822-2

Published in the United States by

TAN Books

PO Box 269

Gastonia, NC 28053

[www.TANBooks.com](http://www.TANBooks.com)

*To my wife, Anne, in thanksgiving  
for our Eucharistic life together*

*“If any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread  
which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh.”*

*—John 6:51*

# Contents

<i>Foreword</i> . . . . .	<i>ix</i>
Introduction: Source and Summit of the Christian Life. . . . .	1
Part I: The Source: The Foundations of Christian Culture . . . .	21
1 Nature and Culture: Soil for Supernatural Food . . . . .	25
2 Feeding a Holy People: Celebration and Memory in the Old Testament . . . . .	37
3 The Incarnation: The Abiding Center of All Things . . . . .	55
4 A Eucharistic Church: Christ's Body in the World . . . . .	73
Part II: The Summit: The Eucharistic Heart of the Christian Life . . . . .	105
5 The Mass: Eternity Enters Time . . . . .	109
6 Praying the Mass: Union with Christ's Sacrifice. . . . .	127
7 Divine Intimacy: Communion and Adoration. . . . .	145
8 Eucharistic Practices: Fasting and Confession . . . . .	167
Part III: The Christian Life: Building a Eucharistic Civilization . . . . .	187
9 Living a Eucharistic Life: The Heart of Catholic Culture . . . . .	191
10 Keeping Eucharistic Time: Shaping the Rhythm of Life . . . . .	217
11 Making Space for Jesus: The Tabernacle of the World . . . . .	237
12 Fostering Eucharistic Encounters: Honoring Christ's Body in the World . . . . .	257
13 The Heart of the World: How the Eucharist Can Save Civilization . . . . .	279

Conclusion: <i>Ite Missa Est</i> . . . . .	311
<i>Appendix I: Recommended Books</i> . . . . .	323
<i>Appendix II: Prayers</i> . . . . .	327
<i>Bibliography</i> . . . . .	339



## Foreword

**B**efore joining Dr. Staudt in the discussion of how the Eucharist can save civilization, we should ask ourselves whether civilization is worth saving.

What exactly is civilization?

According to Wikipedia, it is “any complex state society characterized by a social hierarchy . . . a perceived separation from and domination over the natural environment . . . urbanization (or the development of cities), centralization, the domestication of both humans and other organisms, specialization of labor, culturally ingrained ideologies of progress and supremacism, monumental architecture, taxation . . . and expansionism.”<sup>1</sup> At this point, we could be forgiven for questioning whether we still see civilization as something that is good and worth defending. How many of us would fight for civilization if we thought that we were fighting for the increasing complexity of the state and its social hierarchy? How many of the agrarians among us would fight for a civilization that defined itself as being separate from the natural environment and as seeking to dominate it? How many of us would fight for incessant urbanization, centralization, and the passive domestication of ourselves alongside the

---

<sup>1</sup> Wikipedia, s.v. “Civilization,” last modified June 15, 2022, 17:54, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civilization>.

domestication of other organisms? How many of us had realized that being civilized was the willingness to make ourselves cattle in the service of increasingly complex social hierarchies? How many of us thought that civilization was marked by the sort of “specialization of labor” that had reduced human work to that of a disposable cog in an increasingly large and complex mechanism? How many of us guessed that civilization was defined by culturally ingrained progressivism and other supremacist ideologies? How many of us perceived that taxation was civilized and that increasing taxation was therefore and presumably a mark of increasing civilization?

If this is indeed “civilization,” we would be justified in hoping that civilization would go to hell and equally justified in believing that it was already in the process of going there.

We would, however, be wrong to abandon civilization because of such woefully awry definitions of it. Having seen how civilization is defined on the internet (the one thing to rule them all and in the darkness bind them), let’s distinguish between such a definition and the Christian understanding of what it is to be civilized.

True civilization is a culture animated by the transcendental trinity of the good, the true, and the beautiful. The authentic presence of goodness is love and its manifestation in virtue. The authentic presence of truth is to be seen in the culture’s conformity to reason, properly understood as an engagement with the objective reality beyond the confines of egocentric subjectivism. The authentic presence of the beautiful is a reverence for the beauty of creation and creativity, properly perceived in the outpouring of the gratitude and

wonder which is the fruit of humility. A society informed and animated by such a culture is truly civilized.

A civilized man is not animated by a desire to shape himself into an image of his “self,” which is itself unknowable, but by a willingness to allow himself to be shaped into an image of the perfect Person beyond himself. Responding to Christ’s trinitarian description of Himself as the Way, the Truth, and the Life, a civilized man surrenders himself to the Way of Virtue (Love), the Truth of Reason, and the Life of Grace (Beauty). In short and in sum, civilization manifests itself in the conforming of the will of man to the will of the Giver of all goodness, truth, and beauty.

What is civilization? It is the conforming of the heart of humanity to the Heart of Christ, even if, as was the case with pre-Christian cultures, the unknown Christ was present in goodness, truth, and beauty and not in His Incarnate Presence. All other definitions of civilization are not only wrong but ultimately uncivilized.

Once we perceive this Christian understanding of civilization, it is evident, as Dr. Staudt illustrates in this splendid book, that the Eucharist can save civilization because the sacramental Presence of Christ is the very heart of civilization itself. As John Senior observed, “Christendom, what secularists call Western Civilization, is the Mass.”<sup>2</sup> Christopher Dawson, in *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*, said much the same thing, albeit less sweepingly: “The preservation and development of . . . liturgical tradition was one of the main preoccupations of the Church in the dark age

---

<sup>2</sup> Senior, *The Restoration of Christian Culture* (Ignatius Press), 15–16.

that followed the barbarian conquest, since it was in this way that the vitality and continuity of the inner life of Christendom which was the seed of the new order were preserved.”<sup>3</sup>

It is through this liturgical tradition and through the grace of the sacraments that the life and light of Christ are made manifest in human culture. The Eucharist is, therefore, together with the other sacraments, the spiritual conduit through which Christ becomes present in history. This Christ-life made present in the sacraments is the very light by which we see and the life by which we live.

As Cardinal Ratzinger reminds us, “One is Church and one is a member thereof, not through a sociological adherence, but precisely through incorporation in this Body of the Lord through baptism and the Eucharist.”<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, as Ratzinger explains, it is through this Eucharistic presence that Christ is present in His Church:

The Eucharistic Presence in the tabernacle does not set another view of the Eucharist alongside or against the Eucharistic celebration, but simply signifies its complete fulfillment. For this Presence has the effect, of course, of keeping the Eucharist forever in church. The church never becomes a lifeless space but is always filled with the presence of the Lord, which comes out of the celebration, leads us into it, and always makes us participants in the cosmic Eucharist. What man of faith has not experienced this? A church without the Eucharistic Presence is somehow dead, even when

---

<sup>3</sup> Dawson, *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*, 43.

<sup>4</sup> Ratzinger, *The Ratzinger Report*, 47.

it invites people to pray. But a church in which the eternal light is burning before the tabernacle is always alive, is always something more than a building made of stones. In this place the Lord is always waiting for me, calling me, wanting to make me “Eucharistic.” In this way, he prepares me for the Eucharist, sets me in motion toward his return.<sup>5</sup>

Although Cardinal Ratzinger’s words refer to the presence of the Eucharist in individual tabernacles in individual churches, they also apply to the Eucharistic presence in the Church herself throughout all the centuries, from the first to the last. Taking the cardinal’s words and applying them to history, we can say that history “never becomes a lifeless space” as long as the Eucharist is present “but is always filled with the presence of the Lord.” The presence of the Eucharist in history makes history itself and all those participating in it “participants in the cosmic Eucharist.” It makes time a participant in eternity. It makes the past and the future coeval with God’s omnipresence. History “without the Eucharistic Presence is somehow dead.” It is Christ, present in the Sacrament, who gives life. It is He who makes all things new—and all things beautiful. It is His Eucharistic Presence in all ages which, as J. R. R. Tolkien proclaimed, is “the one great thing to love on earth”: “Out of the darkness of my life . . . I put before you the one great thing to love on earth: the Blessed Sacrament. . . There you will find romance, glory, honor, fidelity, and the true way of all your loves upon earth, and more than that: death: by the divine

---

<sup>5</sup> Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 90.

paradox, that which ends life, and demands the surrender of all, and yet by the taste (or foretaste) of which alone can what you seek in your earthly relationships (love, faithfulness, joy) be maintained, or take on that complexion of reality, of eternal endurance, that every man's heart desires."<sup>6</sup>

Joseph Pearce

---

<sup>6</sup> Carpenter, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 53–54.

## Introduction

# Source and Summit of the Christian Life

*“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden,  
and I will give you rest” (Mt 11:28).*

Of all the problems that we face today, what is the most destructive? There are so many things we could list: the decline of the family, political division, disease, poverty, and war. “We want God!” This was the answer chanted by the crowd of more than a million people gathered in Warsaw to welcome Pope Saint John Paul II back home when Poland still suffered Communist oppression. With all the suffering and challenges they bore, the Poles still recognized the fundamental problem facing a secular world: the absence of God. If God is most important for human flourishing, turning away from Him presents the greatest problem the world could ever face.

Pope Saint Paul VI called our distance from God the “drama of our time,” framing it as a “split between faith and culture.”<sup>1</sup> God has become absent from our culture because we have built a self-sufficient world based on science and technology

---

<sup>1</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 20.

that thinks it has no need of the divine. Pope Benedict XVI pointed out that this split enters also into the lives of Christians who, even if they attend Mass, still “live as though God did not exist.”<sup>2</sup> He called this a kind of practical atheism, a secularism that undermines the Christian life by holding faith as “irrelevant to daily life.” Many Catholics live no differently than pagans except for fulfilling their Sunday obligation. They keep their faith private rather than sharing it with the world.

The Eucharist, however, manifests God’s radical presence to us, not as an idea or remote divine being, but as coming to each one of us personally. Secularism ultimately fails because we need God to be happy and complete. God wants to help us, to be a part of our life, not to impose Himself on us but to live within us, helping us to become truly alive and truly happy. The Eucharist is not simply a belief. It is an encounter, an abiding communion with the living God, who is meant to shape us both inwardly and outwardly in our entire life. We need the presence of God physically with us, abiding in us, and shaping everything that we do. The Eucharist is something to be lived, a mission and plan that will lead us toward true happiness and fulfillment.

As members of an individualistic culture, we prize our independence. Enhancing the fallen tendency we inherited through original sin, we are inclined to rely even less on God and more on ourselves. We all know, however, that we are broken, that material things do not satisfy us, and that we do not really understand our own lives. Jesus invites us to experience healing and rest and to find meaning in Him. He is the one who gives

---

<sup>2</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience, November 14, 2012.



us what we so desperately need and cannot find anywhere else. He invites us into communion with Him: “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:4–5). On our own, we falter. With Christ, we will see fruit blossom in our lives, not only for ourselves, but for those around us. Attached to the vine, we will flourish and can share the fruit that Jesus grows in us with others. Yes, the Eucharist is both our life and “the life of the world” (Jn 6:51).

And therefore, the Eucharist needs to extend beyond our Sunday obligations to become the foundation for our entire lives and for our civilization. The Blessed Sacrament can set a spiritual fire aflame in our secular culture, giving it life by rekindling the sacred within it. Because God is our maker and redeemer, we simply cannot be happy and fulfilled without Him. The branches wither without the vine. The Eucharist is the answer to our culture’s problems, and as it brings healing and life into us, it also sends us out into the world as agents of this transformation. If we allow it, the Eucharist truly can save our civilization, bringing renewal from the inside and eventually growing to build an entire way of life.

### **Encountering Jesus in the Eucharist**

The Eucharist forms the center of Catholicism—the heart of the Church’s faith and life—because it makes Jesus present to us every day within the Mass. Despite its absolute importance, the frequency with which Catholics experience

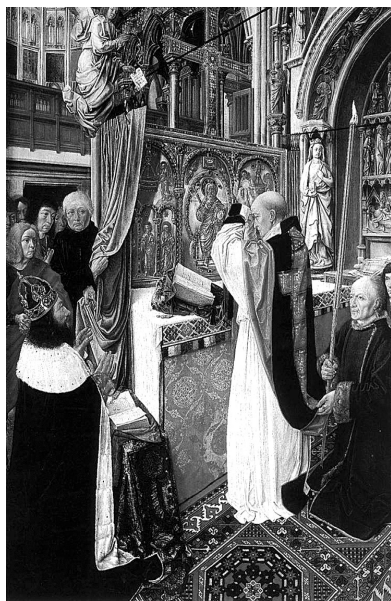
the Eucharist can make it easy to overlook its supernatural power. It can be helpful to take time to reflect anew on the Eucharist and its ability to draw us into an encounter with God. Jesus presents Himself to us in the Eucharist as the source of an ongoing revelation of His identity and a way of drawing us, His disciples, into a deeper friendship. We can see this happening from the first moments of the Church.

For instance, on the day of the Resurrection, two disciples journeyed from Jerusalem to the town of Emmaus and began talking with a stranger along the way. They discussed the recent death of Jesus, and the stranger explained the prophecies from the Old Testament that pointed to the suffering and death of the Messiah. The evangelist Luke describes the culmination of this encounter:

So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He appeared to be going further, but they constrained him, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at table with them, 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?" (Lk 24:28–32)

Luke shows us the way that Jesus makes Himself present and known to us after His resurrection. The disciples could not recognize Jesus in the world any longer, but they encountered Him in the breaking of the bread, which completed their contemplation of Scripture (which is continued in the liturgies of the

Word and the Eucharist during the Mass). After His death and resurrection, Jesus remains present to His Church, although He manifests Himself in a new way through the sacrament of His body and blood. And because He is present to us in this way, He continues to act, sometimes speaking to us and calling us in dramatic ways. This dynamic presence can be seen in the life of Saint Giles, who was celebrating a Mass for the emperor Charlemagne, particularly in reparation for his sins. As depicted by an anonymous painter, in answer to the saint's prayers, Jesus sent an angel down to the altar to reveal a hidden sin of the emperor in order to bring him to full repentance. Through the celebration of the Eucharist, Jesus is not distant from His Church, as He directs and guides it from within. The Eucharist will change our lives if we allow its graces to penetrate our minds and hearts.



Master of Saint Giles, *The Mass of Saint Giles*, c.1490–1500

This living Eucharistic presence enlivens the Church by drawing us into an encounter with Christ, shining light into our dark world. The Mass provides an antidote to our brokenness, sin, and suffering, giving us a healing balm that restores our life. Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton provides a powerful example of the Eucharist's transforming effect in our lives, as it drew her to the Catholic faith while sojourning in Italy. Imagine her pain, becoming a widow in a foreign country without family nearby, feeling deep pain and isolation, alone with her five children. She sought solace in prayer and began attending Mass at a local parish. She was struck by the deep piety expressed toward the Eucharist, and she discovered, to her surprise, God's presence speaking to her there. She had found a new center, a place of refuge, and she embraced the Catholic faith. Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton discovered not only the heart of the Catholic faith in the Eucharist but the heart of reality itself: the God who made us has come into the world and given Himself for us.

Jesus entered the world, born of the Virgin Mary, two thousand years ago, and He continues to do so at each Mass, showing His great desire to enter into communion with us. Jesus offers this intimacy to each of us. Like Saint Elizabeth, it was during a dramatic moment when I came to know Jesus through His real presence in the Eucharist. I was thirteen years old and had just switched over to Catholic school after a traumatic incident in public school. The parish priest, in welcoming me to the school, invited me to serve at the early morning Mass on the anniversary of his ordination. Although I had received my first Communion, I was not a practicing Catholic, and this was the first Mass I had

attended in some time. That dark morning, I encountered Jesus in the Eucharist and received a call to enter into friendship with Him. Jesus manifested His true presence to me, and I felt a clear invitation to follow Him. My life changed at that moment, as Jesus made it clear that I had found my true home and purpose in Him.

### **The Eucharist in the Plan of Life**

Although this book focuses on how the Eucharist shapes life and culture, it is important to begin with some definitions. What do Catholics believe about the Eucharist and the Mass? The Eucharist is the sacrament of Jesus Christ's body and blood. A sacrament, in turn, is a visible sign of an invisible, spiritual reality. It not only symbolizes that reality but, as an efficacious sign, a sacrament actualizes this spiritual reality by making it tangibly present. The sacraments use signs to manifest how God's grace flows through them. Water, the physical sign (or matter) of Baptism, represents the cleansing of sin, and when combined with the form (the words prayed), it actually does cleanse. The signs of the Eucharist, bread and wine, symbolize that God wants to feed us, and when the form is spoken over them by the priest, they truly become the body and blood of Christ. Catholics do not believe that the Eucharist symbolizes Jesus; rather, Catholics believe that the bread and wine really and substantially become His body and blood, making Him present during the Mass.

Catholic belief in the sacraments makes a truly remarkable claim: that God uses material means to bring about supernatural transformation. He uses material means because He made

us as material-spiritual beings (or body-soul unities) who learn even the most profound truths through our senses. In establishing the sacraments, Jesus drew upon the whole history of Israel, fulfilling its ritual and deepening it as a means of transmitting grace. It is only in Jesus's gift of Himself on the cross, removing our sin and bestowing new life on us, that the logic of the sacraments can be seen. When approached in faith, the sacraments unite us to Jesus's saving work, becoming a means of remembrance, presence, and grace.

God also has a plan for each person within the overarching story of salvation history. He established the sacraments to accompany and guide us throughout life, marking our major transitions, growth, and mission. Rogier van der Weyden captures this spiritual journey in his famous altarpiece of the seven sacraments, depicted as stations throughout a church with the cross at the center. Within this sacramental order that guides our life, we must first receive Baptism. This sacrament bestows on us the grace of salvation—the forgiveness of sin and the infusion of God's life—along with the gift of adoption, which offers a share in Jesus's own sonship. These graces are strengthened in Confirmation, which offers a renewed outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The Eucharist completes initiation into the Christian life by enabling regular communion with God and providing the spiritual food needed to nourish the soul. When sin wounds this communion, it can be renewed in the sacrament of Penance (or confession), as well as the Anointing of the Sick, which prepares us for eternal life in the midst of sickness and death. Finally, there are two sacraments of mission that draw those called into service of the Church. The sacrament of Holy Orders, by which men participate in Christ's

own headship and service, provides access to and oversight of all the sacraments. Matrimony serves the Church by bringing forth new believers and then nurturing that Christian life within the walls of the domestic Church.



Rogier van der Weyden, *Seven Sacraments Altarpiece*,  
1445–50 (side panels altered in size for uniformity)

The Eucharist stands as the greatest of the seven sacraments because it not only communicates God's grace but makes the Son of God truly present to us in tangible fashion. The word "Eucharist" means "thanksgiving," continuing the prayer of thanks that Jesus offered to the Father at the Last Supper, the night before His suffering and death on the cross. During a meal with His disciples, He celebrated the first Eucharist by offering His body and blood in sacrifice under the form of bread and wine to be eaten. In the Eucharistic celebration, known as the Mass, this offering of Jesus is remembered in a way that makes His action present through the ministry of

the priest. Thus, the Eucharist constitutes our supreme act of worship by enabling us to share in Christ's offering of Himself on the Cross. The Mass also enables us to enter into communion with the Son of God, receiving His body, blood, soul, and divinity, the divinity He shares with the Father and the Holy Spirit. The deepest reality of the Eucharist, therefore, is communion with the Triune God: resting in the bosom of the Father, through Christ, and in the Holy Spirit.

### **How the Eucharist Shapes Culture**

The Eucharist forms the heart of Catholic culture as the vital center that inspires and animates the life of Catholics. Without it, culture would simply comprise a collection of outward forms built up by our best efforts. Through the Eucharist, Christian culture becomes an outpouring of the divine life into our own lives that, when accumulated across the lives of believers, takes root also in communities. The word "culture" may sound complex or arcane, but it could be defined simply as a "shared way of life." It is made up of the beliefs, relationships, practices, customs, and societal structures that give a communal sense of identity and purpose. It can exist on a micro level within a family, school, parish, or local community, as well as on a macro level for a region, a country, or groups of nations, becoming a civilization, a higher form of culture that shapes education, economics, and politics. It can also exist within religious groups that share beliefs and practices even when dispersed across distinct ethnic or national cultures. Culture is a fundamental necessity for human life. We need to live in communion with others and jointly pursue common goods, both earthly and spiritual.



As Catholics, we can live our faith more easily with the help of others and by instantiating it within concrete practices. Aidan Nichols helps us to consider this by contrasting the Middle Ages to our own culture: “It is surely clear that the medieval Christian at prayer was supported culturally by a whole way of life. . . . By comparison, the contemporary Christian experiences an absence of God in the world today.”<sup>3</sup> He refers to our culture as a spiritual desert that makes it difficult to sustain faith and prayer because of the lack of any general support and the existence of so many obstacles. We can feel like the faithful in Achille Beltrame’s depiction of a church during the First World War, trying to stay focused on Jesus even as everything gives way around us.



Achille Beltrame, *Christ Wounded by Bombs*, 1918

---

<sup>3</sup> Nichols, *Christendom Awake*, 204.

The historian Robert Lewis Wilken makes a case for why we need Christian culture to sustain faith. He defines culture as “the pattern of inherited meanings and sensibilities encoded in rituals, law, language, practices, and stories that can order, inspire, and guide the behavior, thoughts, and affections of a Christian people.”<sup>4</sup> Flowing from this understanding, he asks, “Can Christian faith—no matter how enthusiastically proclaimed by evangelists, how ably expounded by theologians and philosophers, or how cleverly translated into the patois of the intellectual class by apologists—be sustained for long without the support of a nurturing Christian culture?” He asks this rhetorical question to highlight the fact that our culture is missing the fertile soil where faith can grow and flourish. Our deficient soil points us to a pressing need to recover a Christian culture, even on the micro level, to support the life of faith. Wilken argues that “nothing is more needful today than the survival of Christian culture, because in recent generations this culture has become dangerously thin.” Yes, Christian culture has become too thin, and Catholics urgently need to begin living their faith more robustly than ever before. If not, our Christian culture will wilt and be overtaken by a pagan society.

A consideration of culture may help us understand why it is so difficult to live the faith and why so many people fall away from it. They are experiencing the split between how they live and what they believe, a split that can run right through us. It is true that Jesus did not come to earth

---

<sup>4</sup> Robert Louis Wilken, “The Church as Culture,” *First Things*, April 2004, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2004/04/the-church-as-culture>.

to form a new culture, understood as a distinctive way of eating, dressing, and living for one ethnic group or nation. Rather, He proclaimed the Kingdom of God, a new radical inbreaking of God's presence in the world through His own entrance into it. Jesus's mission, however, should transform culture, shaping how Christians live in the world by bringing us into communion with God. Jesus's teaching on culture could be summarized with His words from the Sermon on the Mount: "Seek first his kingdom . . . and all these things [such as eating, drinking, and dressing] shall be yours as well" (Mt 6:33). Christian culture flows from faith, seeking to put God first and to live in accord with that faith.

Pope Benedict XVI offers a powerful example from history to demonstrate this point. Following the collapse of the Roman Empire, Benedictine monks left the world and entered the monastery to seek God (*quaerere Deum*) and unintentionally—through their dedication to the word and to their work—laid the foundations for a whole new civilization in Europe built around this search.<sup>5</sup> Christians create culture not by making culture the goal but by putting God first in life and ordering everything else to Him. Culture draws what we believe and how we live together. For this reason, Pope Saint John Paul II challenged us by pointing out that "a faith that does not become culture is a faith not fully accepted, not entirely thought out, not faithfully

---

<sup>5</sup> See Pope Benedict XVI, "Meeting with Representatives from the World of Culture," Collège des Bernardins, Paris, September 12, 2008, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/september/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20080912\\_parigi-cultura.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080912_parigi-cultura.html).

lived.”<sup>6</sup> Faith is not abstract belief, but rather, it is meant to shape the everyday life of Christians, living out what we believe concretely in communion with others. Worship should be at the heart of our culture, shaping our thoughts, how we spend our time, the space in which we live and pray, and how we form relationships.

Putting God first provides a sound basis for forming the material elements of culture as well. Faith stimulates our work and prayer so that through them, we can guide the world to reach toward its true goal, found only in God. We need to look at Christian culture especially through the lens of the Eucharist because it is the center of the Christian life. Within it, spirit transforms matter, God enters the world, and creation offers back to the Creator a perfect work of prayer and sacrifice, offering to the Father a gift of infinite value. God draws our own work into this sacrifice, sanctifying our humanity and life, and shapes our life and work through it. According to the same logic, the Eucharist transforms not only our soul but our entire life, as we incarnate its fruits in our family life, work, and leisure. Christian culture as a whole becomes sacramental, an expression of the divine bursting forth from God’s entrance into the world.

### **Can the Eucharist Save Civilization?**

Can we save civilization? The question itself can seem overwhelming when we look at the magnitude of the world’s problems. It is hard enough to come to terms with the problems in one’s own life. Who can save civilization? There is

---

<sup>6</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 59.

only one person ultimately who can do it: God, who has made Himself present to us in the Incarnation and continues to do so in the Eucharist. He is the answer and remedy for every problem that society and man faces. The difficulty is, however, that Jesus does not necessarily want to save civilization. He does not care about all of the structures that we have built up *per se*. He cares about each and every soul living in the world. He did not come into the world for the sake of civilization. He came into the world for our sake.

He does want us, through the power of His grace, to do our part in serving others and building up a world that focuses more on what truly matters. As we have seen in Jesus's teaching on the Sermon on the Mount, if we focus on God first, then everything else will fall into place. The Eucharist can help us to save the world, although not in the way we may expect. We should not care about civilizations for their own sake—the power and wealth of nations—but as a vehicle for making the world more human in the truest sense: a civilization of love that promotes the true flourishing of the human person. It is not that civilization doesn't matter. It is true, of course, that a good civilization should help us to live a good life and a bad one will do the opposite. Christians do, therefore, need to work to transform the world in Christ. Salvation, however, remains our first priority, and only through union with Christ will our work have effect in changing the world.

It may sound overly pious to point to the Eucharist as the means of healing and rebuilding civilization, although what could serve as a more powerful source than God's own presence in the world? The Mass, therefore, lays out its own plan

for renewal. The Eucharist literally contains what is most needed for renewal—in our own lives, yes, but also for our society. It is a real plan. How did Christians withstand the Roman Empire? How did we rebuild culture in the Dark Ages? What stood in the center of the culture of Christendom? Why has the Church not simply died out under the persecutions of countless modern revolutions, like so many had predicted? In all of these cases, there is the same answer, one which we could still say to the world, quoting Jesus's enigmatic saying to His disciples: "I have food to eat of which you do not know" (Jn 4:32). This is the food that gives life, a life that the world does not know about but which it desperately needs.

The Eucharist is the greatest force for change. It can and will alter us into other Christs for the world. We are not simply individuals, however, no matter how much the world tells us that we are autonomous. By eating this hidden food, God changes us so that we can, in turn, change the world, spreading the Gospel to every corner of society, not for the glory of the Church or any nation, but for the good of all people. Civilization is not simply the external mechanisms of a society. It is made up of all those living within it. Civilization can be saved by changing and transformation those living within it, by a creative minority or the conversion of multitudes. By transforming our lives, He will begin the work of transforming our family, our parish, our work, and, over time, even our civilization.

### **A Eucharistic Revival: Immersed in the Source and Summit of the Christian Life**

The Eucharist truly provides life for our soul and our way of life, or “culture.” It is not enough to believe in the Eucharist, or even to receive this sacrament regularly. Jesus wants the Eucharist to reshape our humanity, to transform who we are and how we live every day, and even to save our civilization. This book, therefore, proposes how Catholics can *live* the Eucharist. Nothing is more important for the Christian life than living with, in, and through Jesus, flowing from our Eucharistic encounter and communion with Him. The Church expresses the supreme importance of the Eucharist by calling it “the source and summit of the Christian life.” The phrase may be often quoted, but it is important to ask what it truly means and how it applies to life. The Eucharist is the source through which God comes into the world, the summit in our ongoing encounter with Christ at the Mass, and the heart of the Christian life that emerges from this encounter. Jesus comes within our souls to transform us so that we in turn may shape the world with the grace He gives us. This book contains three parts that will explore the Eucharist in these three dimensions.

First, it examines the source in how Christ has manifested His presence throughout history in the culture of Israel and the Church. This first section uses the story of salvation history to examine how Jesus established the Eucharist as the source of the spiritual life in communicating His presence to the world. It demonstrates how the Eucharist perfects humanity’s religious nature through the covenants of

the Old Testament and by the Word becoming flesh, which continues to shape the Church's life. Second, it presents the summit, the way in which the faithful come into contact with this presence through the Mass and sacraments to transform our lives. It looks at how the Eucharist forms the summit of the Christian life through the communion with God it offers. It describes how heaven breaks forth into the world through the Mass, making the sacrifice of Christ present, drawing believers into a communion of love and requiring serious preparation to form the right disposition to receive Christ. And third, it details the Christian life, the way in which we live in response to this encounter, transforming the world and building up culture and civilization. This last part presents how the Eucharist constitutes the heart of the Christian life, the animating impulse of the life of the disciple. It explains how the Eucharist shapes the Christian life by forming a Christian culture, shaping time through prayer, extending into the world, and guiding all actions through charity.

These parts or sections could also be described through the words "recognize," "receive," and "respond." First, it is important to recognize the truth of the Eucharist and how God presents it within the story of salvation history. Second, the Christian encounters its reality in prayer, receiving it sacramentally within the Mass. Third, it shapes the Christian life, making it a response to Jesus's presence within the sacrament of His love. This response should be the beginning of a revolution to reorder all things in our lives and, consequently, in the world. The Eucharist should form the basis for a whole way of life that also includes a way of seeing.



The Eucharist shapes the Christian imagination, leading the believer to see all things differently, not just some things. To foster this renewed perspective, this book will present many images within its narrative that capture a Eucharistic and sacramental vision ordered toward the building up of Christian culture.

It is important to note that this book will appear during the three-year Eucharistic revival led by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). The Church in the United States was rocked by a 2019 Pew survey that revealed only one third of Catholics in the country believed in the true presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. The bishops realized that after decades of declining church attendance, ineffective catechesis, and a breakdown of the Christian life, something must be done. Under the leadership of Bishop Andrew Cozzens, the USCCB released the following plan:

Over three years, every Catholic diocese, parish, school, apostolate, and family is invited to be a part of renewing the Church by enkindling a living relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist. This Revival launches on the Feast of Corpus Christi, June 19, 2022. Over the next three years, dioceses will host Eucharistic Congresses and processions. Parishes will increase or begin Eucharistic Adoration. There will be a revival of faithful adherence to the liturgical norms in all their richness—the *ars celebrandi*. Families and friends will gather in small groups to learn and pray together. Filled with the flame of charity from the reception of Jesus in the Eucharist, missionary disciples will go to the

margins, recognizing the mystery of Jesus' presence in the poor. All of this will culminate in the first National Eucharistic Congress in the United States in almost fifty years.<sup>7</sup>

The Eucharist is *literally* the lifeblood of the Church, for Christ's very body and blood flows through those who receive Him worthily. Hopefully, this three-year effort will spark longer-term renewal leading to stronger faith in Jesus's Eucharistic presence and a life lived in accord with it. Belief is tied to practice. Sadly, it is hard to believe in Jesus's true presence when we do not act like He is truly present, and His presence does not seem to change our lives.

The book's particular contribution can be seen in applying the doctrine and spirituality of the Eucharist toward forming a Christian way of life or culture with the Blessed Sacrament at its center. A Christian civilization will be only as strong and vibrant as its devotion to the Eucharist. This book also forms a short guide for understanding, entering into, and living through the Eucharist. Its key contention focuses on how the Eucharist must shape how we live and order all we do to God in thanksgiving and for His glory. If we as Christians respond to this call, it will not only change our own lives but also reverberate throughout the world and become a source of hope for our civilization.

---

<sup>7</sup> National Eucharistic Revival, "About the Revival," accessed 3/19/22, <https://eucharisticrevival.org/about/#about-the-revival>.