

# A Transforming Presence among Us When Gathered in the Name of the Crucified and Risen Christ

Harold M. Daniels

Seeking deeper spiritual enrichment, my wife, Marie, and I once went to New Skete,<sup>1</sup> an Eastern Orthodox monastery in the village of Cambridge, New York, for the *triduum*.<sup>2</sup> The liturgy for Good Friday was the first use of a new shroud (*epitaphios*, shroud of Christ) to cover the monastery altar on Good Friday and Holy Saturday. The shroud was itself an icon, a life-sized image of the entombed Jesus. For this liturgy the shroud covered a low platform serving as a catafalque in the middle of the church. White chrysanthemums and flickering candles surrounding it conveyed a funereal atmosphere. Culminating the liturgy, the faithful approached the shroud in its coffin-like setting, knelt on a rug spread before it, and on their knees inched their way to the shroud, bowed over it and kissed the wounds of Jesus. We stood in awe observing this stirring act of devotion.

The procession had progressed for a time when Father Laurence, the abbot of the monastery, came to us and said, “Marie and Harold, I don’t know what you may think of this, but you are welcome to take part.” We had expected only to observe, but with this invitation, I looked at Marie with a look conveying, “Shall we?” She returned a silent nod. So, we knelt with the faithful and inched our way to the shroud, bowed over the image of Jesus in death and kissed the hands, side, and feet. Remaining on our knees we then inched our way back to our places.

It is hard to convey the spiritual and mystical depth of that experience. It was a mystical experience, a ceremonial act that engages one’s whole being, body, mind, and spirit, far more powerfully than words alone could ever convey. I had kissed the wounds of Jesus, the One who was executed because his words

and deeds of love and compassion threatened the controlling powers of civil and religious authorities. Jesus thus died for me and this broken world because he proclaimed a way of being, the way of love, which is the life of the Eternal for all human relationships. No, the experience was not factual as fact is measured; but mystically, sacramentally, I had truly kissed the body of the One who is for Christians the Lord of all life. It was a spiritual experience, a communing of spirit with Spirit, a reality not apparent to our reasoning minds.

Fed by this experience, the Paschal Vigil the following night was the most glorious celebration of resurrection I had ever experienced. It reinforced the truth that the powers that executed Jesus could not keep him in a tomb, for Christ has risen! We can sing “the kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever, King of kings, and Lord of lords.”<sup>3</sup>

The New Skete experience deepened my understanding of what we mean when we affirm the real presence of Christ in our liturgical assemblies. Real presence became a reality mystically experienced in life, not simply a mental assent to an abstract doctrine.

## Real Presence in the Worshipping Assembly

Throughout the centuries, real presence, understood in various ways, has centered on the crucified and risen Christ being present and operative in the Eucharist.<sup>4</sup> It asserts that Christ *gives*, not merely *gave*, that we *receive*, not merely *remember* that Jesus once gave.

Harold M. Daniels staffed the Office of Worship of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and its antecedent churches for fifteen years, during which time he was project director and editor of the *Book of Common Worship* (1993). Now in retirement, he resides in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

The act of feasting on bread and wine in the Sacrament endures as the climactic moment of real presence in Christian liturgy. However, to *exclusively* associate the presence of Christ with the Sacrament tends to dissociate the presence of the risen Christ from the rest of the liturgy. It also tends to separate the divinity of Jesus from the humanity of Jesus, isolating the risen Christ from all of the common and ordinary stuff of everyday life.

Hearing the Gospels read and consuming the sacramental bread and wine in the eucharistic meal are both transforming when embraced as living encounters with the risen Christ. When we embrace this mystery, our Sunday assemblies can recapture the experience of followers of Jesus on that first day of the resurrection of Christ, who leaped from their supper table in Emmaus and ran with exuberance to tell other disciples of their experience on the road and during the meal that followed. Excitedly, they told how their “hearts burned within them” as the Scriptures were opened, and the presence of the risen Christ “was made known to them in the breaking of the bread” (Luke 24:13–35). So too, our assemblies can be *extra-ordinary* moments in the midst of the *ordinariness* of life.

## The Sacramental Nature of Reading the Gospels

From earliest times, Christians have given special importance to reading the sacred writings in their assemblies. However, over time this gradually eroded until in many worshiping assemblies it has become a brief reading related to the sermon. The result is that the sermon determines the Scripture selection, rather than the Scripture determining the sermon. This severe minimalism, still common in many congregations, denies the faithful the full richness of the Scriptures.

The availability of the common lectionary is thus the most far-reaching reform in our time to overcome this failure. It gives prominence to reading Scripture in the Sunday assembly, spreading a rich fare before the people to “inwardly digest.”<sup>5</sup> We hear stories and commandments that formed the life of the ancients, ponder the depths of enduring wisdom, hear calls for justice from the prophets, sing ageless songs of praise and lament, listen to the letters of Paul and others admonishing the church, and *hear the Gospels read*.

Hearing the Gospels read is especially significant. They have long been regarded by Christians as the

*crown of all Scriptures*, for they provide apostolic witness to the eternal truth in word and deed that Jesus enfleshed. The lectionary honors the Gospels by making their reading the climactic and culminating reading.<sup>6</sup>

We tend to forget that the Gospels were written for the specific purpose of reading them aloud in the assemblies of first-century Christians. It was the way they were made accessible to the people. Reading the Gospels aloud in *our* assemblies can have great power and presence just as it did in those early centuries.

In the sound of a voice reading the Gospel, the presence of the Christ is lifted from the printed page and becomes a living presence in the assembly. Voiced in breath, with rhythm, phrasing, pace, and cadence, we listen with heart and mind. The presence of the risen Christ moves through the words lifted from the Gospel into hearts and lives of the assembly in new and surprising ways to transform and redirect our lives. The Word becomes flesh anew among us, giving *presence* to the meaning of Jesus’ good news for us and for the life of the world. It is a living encounter that is both mystical and sacramental.<sup>7</sup>

## Hearing the Gospels with Body, Mind, and Spirit

The Gospels are to be heard with our whole being. To ignore the engagement of the body in our liturgies is to disregard the very nature of our being *bodies*. In daily relationships, gestures, body movements, and facial expressions reveal inner dispositions and reactions. So also, liturgical ceremonial actions convey meaning more powerfully than words alone, and are essential for effective worship that shapes our lives. Failure to employ the sensory aspects of our humanity in worship fails to guide worshipers into the fullest engagement of liturgical prayer.<sup>8</sup> Although many Protestants remain suspicious of ceremonial engagement, worshipers are beginning to recognize that worship is most effective when it engages body, mind, and spirit, with recent books of worship incorporating more ceremonial action than in the recent past.

In the reading of the Gospel, an engaging ritual is for the assembly to welcome the reading by rising and singing a gospel acclamation, such as, “Alleluia! Lord, to whom shall we go? Your words are words of eternal life. Alleluia!”<sup>9</sup> Standing and singing such an acclamation expresses the spirit in which we

greet the crucified and risen Christ in the Gospel reading.<sup>10</sup>

During the singing, a Gospel Book containing the four Gospels is carried into the midst of the assembly.<sup>11</sup> It is a metaphorical action in both Eastern and Western Christianity, signifying the presence of the living Christ in the midst of the assembly. It captures the concept conveyed in Matthew's Gospel where we are reminded of Jesus saying "where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (18:20), and "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (28:20). After singing the acclamation, the assembly remains standing for the reading.

As the reader announces the text, it is common ecumenical practice for many of the faithful to make a small sign of the cross upon forehead, then upon lips and breast, while silently praying:

Christ,  
be in my + mind.  
upon my + lips,  
and in my + heart.

It is a very personal prayer for the living Christ to be in our thinking, our speaking, and in our love of God and neighbor. This simple act conveys the spirit with which we listen to the reading of the Gospel.

The *Book of Common Worship* includes a common ecumenical practice to frame the Gospel reading with personal address to the risen Christ.<sup>12</sup> After the reader announces the reading, the assembly responds addressing the risen Christ, "Glory to you, O Lord." From ancient times, the church has believed that reading the Gospel in the worshiping assembly is a sacramental encounter with the risen Christ present in the assembly. This ritual action thus recaptures the way the Gospels were received among the earliest Christians. As Gordon Lathrop reminds us, "carrying of the bound Gospels into the midst of an assembly . . . and the singing around this book as if addressing the risen one encountered in the text . . . can be seen as having caught the intention of the Gospels themselves."<sup>13</sup> The Jesus-*then* becomes the living Christ-*now*. After the reading, the assembly responds, again in words of personal address of thanksgiving, "Praise to you, O Christ."

As the Gospel Book is returned to its place, the people silently contemplate the reading and

the significance of the Word becoming flesh, now sacramentally present in their midst. The sermon that follows interprets the significance of the reading for today, proclaiming the Jesus who is present *now*, in our lives, and present for the life of the world. Prayers follow for healing the brokenness of the world.

## Known in "the Breaking of the Bread"

The liturgy then moves to the sacred feast. The holy table is spread with bread and wine while the offerings of the people are gathered. Voicing the thankfulness of the assembly, the presider then gratefully recalls in the Great Thanksgiving: God's work in creation; the witness of the prophets; God's steadfast love in spite of human failure; and the Eternal Word becoming flesh in Jesus' life, ministry, death, and resurrection, anticipating the coming of the fullness of God's reign. Offering ourselves anew to the lordship of Christ and the reign of God, we invoke God's Spirit, that in consuming this bread and wine we will be made one with the living Christ, ingesting the risen Christ into our very being and life. Together we then pray the prayer that Jesus taught that we may follow in the way of life we are called to embody.<sup>14</sup>

The liturgy then comes to its climactic moment. The presider, in silence, takes a loaf of bread, breaks it, and proclaims, "Jesus Christ, the bread of life for the life of the world," then lifts a cup of wine continuing, "The vine in whom we abide as branches." The presider then gives assurance of God's never-failing grace: "All who abide in Christ will never hunger or thirst." Lifting both bread and cup and extending them toward the assembly, the presider proclaims, "The gifts of God, for the people of God."<sup>15</sup>

The biblical allusions for the words spoken in breaking the bread (John 6:35a, 48; 15:5; 6:35b) are based on two of the seven I AM sayings in the Fourth Gospel.<sup>16</sup> Words drawn from the story of the feeding of the multitude capture the universal, cosmic dimensions of Jesus as being the *bread of life for the life of the world*. The concept of Jesus as the true vine is drawn from Jesus' discourse at supper on the evening before his crucifixion. It portrays Jesus in both personal and relational terms. Jesus is the true vine (the universal), in whom we abide as branches (the relational, personal). To abide in Christ is to so embody Jesus Christ that we will become a living expression of the love of Christ

as the body of Christ in the world. Abiding in Christ satisfies our innermost hungers for purpose and quenches our driest thirsting for meaning.

These actions done in silence, alongside carefully crafted words, convey the meaning and purpose of the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us, now abiding with us as the risen Christ. Rather than being a funereal remembering of Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross in the *past*, our faith is enriched when this eucharistic meal focuses on the risen Christ *now* giving life in abundance, healing our innermost being, and offering hope for the life of the world. Since music engages the spirit so powerfully, it is critically important that the music during the feast truly proclaim that this meal is truly "the *joyful* feast of the people of God."

When, at the breaking of the bread, it is proclaimed that the risen Christ is a living reality *now*, a powerful understanding of real presence is conveyed. It can transform not only our personal lives as committed disciples, but our ecclesiology and witness in the varied contexts of life. It gives understanding to the church being the body of Christ for the life of the world.

## Enfleshing the Risen Christ

The climactic moment of the entire liturgy occurs when we gather at the holy table for the feast, consume the bread placed in our hands, and drink the wine given to us. It is climactic, for in receiving, eating and drinking, we yield ourselves anew to being disciples of Jesus. It brings personal fulfillment to the words we pray in the Great Thanksgiving, "We offer our very selves to you to be a living and holy sacrifice, dedicated to your service."<sup>17</sup> It is transforming, not only in receiving the gift of God through bread and wine, but in recommitting our lives to God and to the reign of God.

In giving the bread the server says, "The bread of heaven." The word *heaven*, as used here, is a metaphor signifying an ordering of all life that is shaped by the reign of God, a way of being that transcends the powers that seek to control our lives. It is the way of life we were created to embody, the way of love.<sup>18</sup> Jesus Christ, the bread of life, is the food that nurtures us in the reign of God, just as the manna from above nurtured the children of Israel in their journey after their escape from slavery.

Similarly, in receiving wine from the cup, the server says, "The cup of salvation." As proclaimed in the Gospels, the meaning of *salvation* is to be made

whole in all life, both in a personal sense and in all human relationships. In drinking from the cup of salvation, we consume the sacramental sign of hope for the transformation of life.<sup>19</sup>

These two metaphors, *bread of heaven* and *cup of salvation*, add significant depth of meaning to the words at the breaking of the bread: that Jesus Christ is the *bread of life for the life of the world*. Just as the food we ingest becomes part of the cells of our body, maintaining life, so in this feast we ingest the essence of the One who lived among us healing life's brokenness and giving sight to life's blindness. The Word, who became flesh, becomes enfleshed in us.

Alternative words said in giving the bread and wine are "The body of Christ, given for you" and "The blood of Christ, given for you." Many communicants associate *body* and *blood* in the Sacrament with the body of Jesus dying on the cross shedding his blood as a sacrifice to satisfy the judgment of God. This concept continues to undermine efforts toward celebrating the Eucharist each Lord's Day. A different and transforming concept is conveyed when we understand that the way of life that Jesus set forth in words and deeds so threatened the ruling powers that it led to his execution. Jesus thus gave his life for us and for all. In the Sacrament, *body* therefore signifies the transforming *power* unleashed in Jesus' self-giving death.

Moreover, when we recognize that *blood is life*, without which there is *no* life, another transforming concept emerges. The *blood* of Jesus Christ was the *life* of Jesus Christ. The very essence of the *life* of the crucified and risen Christ is *love*. The fourth-century *Apostolic Constitutions* conveys this when it describes the sacramental cup being given with the words "The blood of Christ, the cup of life." The essential meaning is that the power of *love*, as the very *life* of the crucified and risen One, is given to us in bread and wine. They are truly "the gifts of God for the people of God."<sup>20</sup>

This eucharistic meal is thus more than consuming a morsel of bread and sip of wine. The piece of bread placed in our hands and the sip of wine on our lips is the climactic moment in the liturgy. In this moment we reaffirm our ultimate trust in God, enflesh the crucified and risen Christ, and are renewed as the body of Christ to live in the mix of life as icons of the Lord of life. It is truly transforming.

After all have been served, it is therefore fitting that the assembly seek God's help praying in these or similar words:

Loving God,  
as you have fed us with the body of Christ,  
send us out to be the body of Christ in  
the world.  
Help us to love as Christ loved us.  
Knowing our own weakness,  
help us stand with all who stumble.  
Sharing in his suffering,  
help us remember all who suffer.  
Held in his love,  
help us embrace all whom the world denies.  
Rejoicing in his forgiveness,  
help us forgive all who sin against us.  
Give us strength to serve you faithfully  
for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.<sup>21</sup>

## For the Life of the World

The liturgy does not end when the people leave the place of assembly. Since the meaning of *liturgy* is “the work of the people,” the liturgy extends beyond the place of assembly in the lives of the people scattered in the varied contexts and structures of daily life.

Nor is the *presence* of the crucified and risen Christ confined to our gathering in worship. Jesus did not say, “Come, *worship* me,” but Jesus did say, again and again, “Come, *follow* me”—meet me in the suffering and brokenness of the world. Although the climactic moment of the gathered assembly is in feasting at the holy table, the *truly* climactic moments occur in the *life of the world*.

Having been *fed* with the body of Christ, we are to *be* the body of Christ, a healing presence of the crucified and risen One in the midst of the world's brokenness, embodied in every touch of compassion. To be the body of Christ is to help alleviate suffering, give hope to the battered and bruised, seek peace in the midst of conflict, call for justice in the face of injustice, feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, comfort the dying and bereaved, provide learning for the unlearned, help open eyes blinded by prejudice. To embody such compassion is *central* in being Jesus' disciples. Anglican bishop John A. T. Robinson eloquently expressed this fifty years ago in his prophetic book *Honest to God*:

The test of worship is how far it makes us more sensitive to “the beyond in our midst,” to the Christ in the hungry, the naked, the homeless and the prisoner. Only if *we* are *more* likely to recognize him there after attending an act of worship is that worship Christian rather than a piece of religiosity in Christian dress.<sup>22</sup>

As the assembly prepares to depart to re-engage in daily life, it is particularly significant when a deacon (or another who is engaged in a ministry of compassion in a broken world), standing at the door leading out from the place of assembly, gives the charge as the final words of the gathered assembly. While all disciples of Jesus are to be the presence of the compassion of Christ in the world, deacons are ordained to the specific ministry of compassion. The ministry of deacons is to extend “the compassion of Christ for the poor and the friendless, the sick, the grieving, and the troubled,” to show “courage to bear the gospel into the halls of power,” and to communicate God's “presence and might among those who are powerless.”<sup>23</sup> Thus, in giving the charge, the deacon is enlisting all the faithful to be partners in embodying the compassion of Jesus in the life of the world, extending the liturgy beyond the liturgy in the place of assembly.

Gordon Lathrop reminds us that the purpose of our Lord's Day assemblies is for “telling the truth about the world and God, enabling a group of needy people to come to trust in God again through Jesus Christ, and so, by the power of the Spirit, beginning to make signs of witnessing love in the world.”<sup>24</sup> The Sunday assembly of the faithful is to be an encounter with the crucified and risen Christ, transforming us into being the body of Christ, a healing presence in the world for the sake of the world.

Go in peace  
and in the name of Christ,  
remember the poor.<sup>25</sup>

## Notes

1. New Skete, a monastery related to the Orthodox Church of America, is unique for its reforms seeking to make Orthodox liturgy more comprehensible. The monks defend their reforms when criticized by Orthodox traditionalists, believing that their reforms are necessary if Eastern Orthodox monasticism is to be “more than ‘museum-keeping’ in the modern world.” The monastery is comprised of three separate

communities—monks, nuns, and companions—and displays remarkable openness with other Christian traditions. This is clearly evidenced in the iconographic portrayals in the monastery’s Holy Wisdom Temple, which include Pope John XXIII, Anglican Archbishop Michael Ramsey, and Mother Teresa of Calcutta. This openness is further evidenced on a plaque on the monastery’s bell tower stating that the largest of the three large bells is from the former church building of St. Paul’s Roman Catholic Church in Hudson Falls, New York, and the tower’s tuned set of twelve bells was donated by First Presbyterian Church (“The Fish Church”) of Stamford, Connecticut.

2. The *triduum* (or Three Great Days) is the liturgy of the paschal mystery, one continuous liturgy (in three segments) extending from Maundy Thursday, through Good Friday, and culminating with the Paschal Vigil. See *Book of Common Worship*, 268–314.
3. The “Hallelujah Chorus” from George Frideric Handel’s oratorio *Messiah*.
4. John Calvin regarded the presence of Christ in the Sacrament as a mystery “too lofty for either my mind to comprehend or my words to declare,” a mystery he would “rather experience than understand.” In consuming the bread and wine he declared, “I do not doubt that he himself truly presents them, and I receive them” (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Library of Christian Classics, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Westminster Press, 1960), 1403–1404, (14.17.32).
5. The phrase “inwardly digest” is from an old collect included in *The Book of Common Worship* (1946), “Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them,” p. 291.
6. Gordon W. Lathrop in his monumental study *The Four Gospels on Sunday: The New Testament and the Reform of Christian Worship* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012) unfolds the importance that reading the Gospels has had in worshiping assemblies from the church’s inception, reveals the uniqueness of each Gospel, and emphasizes their essential role in the church’s life and witness today. It is an important study for reforming worship today.
7. Those appointed to read the Scriptures in the assembly need to be prepared. There are skills to embody to ensure that the Gospel is effectively communicated. These skills can be learned through tutoring, but of greater importance is for the reader to so know and embody the words that the Spirit flows through the reading touching human spirits.
8. This is developed more fully in Harold M. Daniels, “Glorifying God on the Lord’s Day: The Defining Moment in Church’s Life,” *Call to Worship* 44.4 (2011): 49–65. This same issue includes an article by David Batchelder, “Sacramental Liturgy and Its Continuing Incarnation in Mission,” 1–9, in which he unfolds the incarnational nature of liturgy that engages body, mind, and spirit. Other aspects are described in Harold M. Daniels, “The Sign of the Cross,” *Reformed Liturgy & Music*, 21.1 (1987): 39–44.
9. These words are drawn from the account in the Fourth Gospel relating that when many found Jesus’ teaching too difficult to accept they turned away to no longer follow him. Jesus then asked the twelve, “Do you also wish to go away?” Peter replied, “Lord, to whom shall we go? Your words are words of eternal life” (John 6:68, NEB).
10. David Batchelder, “Standing for the Gospel: A Reformed-Ecumenical Perspective,” *Call to Worship*, 45.4 (2012), pp. 6–16, explores the significance of standing for the reading of the Gospel. The same issue includes “Five Gospel Acclamations and Alleluias,” composed by Hal H. Hopson (pp. 63–68) that a congregation can use to welcome the reading of the Gospel.
11. A Gospel Book is a bound volume containing the four Gospels primarily used ceremonially. The *Book of Kells* is a Gospel Book, dating from about 800, written on vellum (calf skin) by Celtic monks, associated with a monastic community then living on the Isle of Iona. It is renowned for its lavish illuminations. *The Gospels: Revised Common Lectionary* contains all of the Gospel readings for the common lectionary’s three cycles. Published by Church Publishing for ceremonial use, it is available from Cokesbury and Amazon.com.
12. First included for Presbyterians in *The Book of Common Worship* (1946), p. 157, it continues in the *Book of Common Worship* (1993), p. 62, and the Presbyterian hymnal *Glory to God*, p. 5.
13. Lathrop, *The Four Gospels on Sunday*, 154.
14. John Dominic Crossan, *The Greatest Prayer: Rediscovering the Revolutionary Message of the Lord’s Prayer* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010). This insightful study will deepen understanding of this prayer when prayed in the liturgy.
15. The New Testament phrase “the breaking of bread” denotes *sharing a meal* together, a phrase that continues today as a metaphor for a *meal*. The specific act of breaking a loaf of bread was part of serving the meal, just as we might savor the slicing of a loaf of bread at table to share with friends. The New Testament adds sacramental meaning to this *meal* rather than to acts preparing it for serving.

Most communicants regard breaking the bread and pouring the wine (a recent introduction to dramatize the Words of Institution) as enacted symbols signifying Jesus’ body *broken* on the cross and his blood *poured out*, reinforcing the twelfth-century substitutionary (or satisfaction) theory of the atonement as a sacrificial offering to God. Thus breaking bread and pouring wine as distinct

ceremonial acts divert minds from the Sacrament's essential character as a shared *meal*.

To more clearly convey the Sacrament as a meal, our eucharistic celebrations are better served when breaking the bread is not a specific ceremonial action, as when the presider lifts the bread high in breaking it. Breaking the loaf into several portions in a manner that more readily conveys its being readied for serving redirects minds to the meal all will share.

Furthermore, the Pauline/Synoptic accounts of the "last supper" relate that bread was *broken* (i.e., for serving) and a cup was *taken* (the table having already been set). In keeping with all biblical sources of the Sacrament, and common ecumenical practice, it is suggested in this essay that the cup (or cups) be filled when preparing the table for the meal during the gathering of the people's offerings, which may also include the offering of the bread and wine. It is further suggested that the bread be broken into portions for serving as an integral part of presenting the bread and wine to the assembly as "the gifts of God, for the people of God." The *meal*, in which we feast upon the One who is *the bread of life for the life of the world*, thus remains clearly the focus.

16. The seven I AM sayings of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, "bread of life" (6:35, 41, 48), "light of the world" (8:12), "gate for the sheep" (10:7, 9), "good shepherd" (10:11, 14), resurrection and the life (11:25), "the way, the truth and the life" (14:6), and "the true vine" (15:1, 5), comprise a powerful christological witness. Unique to the Fourth Gospel, they are linked with the voice from the burning bush, "I AM WHO I AM" (Exod. 3:14), calling Moses to lead the enslaved in Egypt to freedom. This link conveys an understanding that the "I AM WHO I AM" that delivered the enslaved is the Eternal Word, the I AM, embodied in Jesus, present from the beginning, is so now, and will be forevermore, as a presence to deliver and guide. When the mystical nature of these sayings is understood, they counteract the exclusivity that has plagued Christian faith and undermined the universalism implicit in the story of creation, the calls for justice of the prophets, and the words and deeds of Jesus.

For liturgical purposes the two I AM sayings, alluded to in this essay, are recast from being specific quotations of Jesus to more readily convey their significance as a present living reality to transform life now and for all time, rather than be something from the past. In liturgy, a rendition of the text as a quotation—"Jesus said, I am . . ."—implies a past event, historical and biographical, and fails to convey the I AM sense of timelessness present among us now.

17. *Book of Common Worship* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 71, 154, 170, 182, 195, 202, 217, 351, 398. Also see: 128, 141, 230, 239, 258, 276, 320,

345, 388), and *The Book of Common Worship* (1946), 162, 173. The text is based on Romans 12:1.

18. Matthew speaks of the "kingdom of heaven." In parallel references Luke says "kingdom of God." The same meaning pertains to the use of "heaven" in the Lord's Prayer. *Heaven* in these references is a metaphor for a reordered way of life willed by the Eternal One, rather than a *place* beyond this life.
19. Unfortunately, the word *salvation* has become so distorted that its biblical meaning has been lost to most people who tend to think it refers to Jesus dying a sacrificial death to atone for our sins and saving us from eternal judgment. The effect of this distortion is to rewrite the Gospels. Marcus Borg in his book *Speaking Christian: Why Christian Words Have Lost Their Meaning and Power—And How They Can Be Restored* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011) includes *salvation*, *saved*, and *savior* among the words that have been so subverted their meanings need to be recovered.
20. This is developed further in Harold M. Daniels, "Feasting on the Bread of Life in the Reign of God Now and in the Yet-to-Be," *Call to Worship*, 46.2 (2012): 17–25.
21. This prayer is based on a portion of Great Thanksgiving B in the *BCW*, p. 129.
22. John A. T. Robinson, *Honest to God: Fortieth Anniversary Edition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 90. Originally published in 1963, this book, drawing upon the theology of Paul Tillich and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, sparked a revolutionary rethinking of entrenched thought in Christian faith and life. Its relevancy continues, with a fiftieth anniversary edition published in the United Kingdom by SCM in January 2013. The fortieth anniversary edition published for North American readers includes an essay "Honest to God in North America" by Reformed theologian Douglas John Hall. Hall's latest book, *What Christianity Is Not: An Exercise in Negative Theology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), provides greater depth resulting from fifty years of dialogue since *Honest to God* was first published.
23. *Book of Occasional Services: A Liturgical Resource Supplementing the Book of Common Worship*, 1993 (Louisville: Geneva Press, 1999), 26–27.
24. Lathrop, *The Four Gospels on Sunday*, 160.
25. *Glory to God*, 13. This charge, based on Gal. 2:10, derives from a nineteenth-century French Reformed-Huguenot liturgy prepared by French pastor Eugene Bersier. In the French liturgy the charge comprised the final words of the liturgy and followed the blessing (2 Cor. 13:13). A translation of the French text of the charge reads, "Go in peace, remember the poor, and the God of peace be with you all."