

The Amen Corner: The Voices of Children.

Paul Turner

Catholic children sing the memorial acclamation at mass unaware of its unstable liturgical history. In the Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children a new adjustment happens in conferences of bishops such as those in Australia, Canada, and England and Wales, but not in the United States.

The memorial acclamation first appeared in the Latin Rite after the close of the Second Vatican Council. The full, conscious, active participation of the people positioned their voice even into the heart of the eucharistic prayer. The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* called acclamations and the dialogues between the priest and the people “of great significance” for expressing the communitarian nature of the mass (34). The people associate themselves with the priest by their “interventions” in the eucharistic prayer, including “the acclamation after the Consecration” (147).

Far from innovation, the memorial acclamation imported a tradition traceable through the Eastern Rites, especially in the Byzantine Anaphora of Saint James, the Brother of the Lord. A ninth-century manuscript, the earliest extant, preserves a prayer several centuries older. Longer than any Latin Rite eucharistic prayer, it includes acclamations for the people and statements for deacons. Notably, the priest takes up first bread, then cup, while reciting the institution narrative, and the people respond “Amen” each time. Then he assigns to the lips of Jesus words inspired by Saint Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians: “Do this in memory of me, for whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death and resurrection of the Son of Man, until he comes.” The deacons announce, “We believe and profess,” and the people respond, “We proclaim your death, O Lord, and profess your resurrection.”¹

This inspired Pope Saint Paul VI’s Consilium’s Study Group 10, which revised the Order of Mass in the Roman Missal. Successfully parachuting an acclamation of the people into the eucharistic prayer seemed unlikely. But the group won Paul’s approval by copying one from the Anaphora of Saint James. Through it, Roman Catholics would renew their faith that Christ is truly present immediately after the consecration. The people do not sing about the presence of Christ. They sing to Christ who is present.

¹ *Præx eucharistica: Textus e variis liturgiis antiquioribus selecti*, ed. Anton Hänggi, Irmgard Pahl, Editio secunda (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires Fribourg Suisse, 1968), p. 249. My translation. An English translation of the entire liturgy can be found in *Prayers of the Eucharist Early and Reformed*, ed. R. C. D. Jasper and G. J. Cuming, Second Edition, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 60-69.

The study group proposed this acclamation in 1967, but wanted to permit regional authorities to use these or similar words. They also proposed no acclamation at all for the venerable Roman Canon.²

In 1968 Catholic Book Publishing Company released *Eucharistic Prayers and Prefaces* using the new translation from the International Commission on English in the Liturgy.³ The rest of the Order of Mass was not yet ready. This release included the Roman Canon, now called Eucharistic Prayer I, without the people's acclamation; four options for the acclamation appeared only in prayers II, III and IV. Published in Latin and in English, the booklet plainly shows that the first two options translated the same Latin text differently: "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again;" and "Dying you destroyed our death, rising you restored our life. Lord Jesus, come in glory."⁴

The Latin differs slightly from its Byzantine source. The study group would have been familiar with Hänggi-Pahl's Latin translation of the Greek original, which styled the acclamation this way: *Mortem tuam, Domine, annuntiamus et resurrectionem tuam confitemur*. The *editio typica* offered this: *Mortem tuam annuntiamus, Domine, et tuam resurrectionem confitemur, donec venias*. It added the phrase "until you come again," positing that a proper memorial included not only the past but the future coming of Christ. The members also tinkered with the word order. They placed the word *tuam* ("your") after the word for "death" but before the word for "resurrection". By displacing one *tuam*, they created a poetic lilt. The original acclamation distinguishes "proclaim" and "profess" (*annuntiamus* and *confitemur*): The community can "proclaim" the death of the Lord because it is historically verifiable. The resurrection, however, even with the New Testament testimony, is accepted on faith. The community will "profess" the resurrection.

The acclamation won rapid favor, putting pressure on the Roman Canon. In 1968 the study group produced three schemata for the Order of Mass in quick succession: on February 10, March 21 and May 24. The memorial acclamation was added to Eucharistic Prayer I between February and March.⁵ In the United States, the first English translation of the missal, the 1970 *Sacramentary*, had all four memorial acclamations in place within all four eucharistic prayers.⁶

² I have covered some of this material in *At the Supper of the Lamb: A Pastoral and Theological Commentary on the Mass* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications 2011), p. 85.

³ New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1968.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 20* and 32*.

⁵ Maurizio Barba, *La riforma conciliare dell'«Ordo missae»: Il percorso storico-redazionale dei riti d'ingresso, di offertorio e di comunione, Nuova edizione totalmente rivista, ampiamente integrata e diffusamente aggiornata* (Rome: CLV - Edizioni Liturgiche, 2008), p. 743.

⁶ I was a 17-year old seminarian and church musician when the 1970 *Sacramentary* came out. I remember hearing Eucharistic Prayer I without the memorial acclamation prior to that time.

The study group created an introduction to this acclamation: *Mysterium fidei*. Those two words formerly appeared in the consecration of the wine. The priest said in Latin, “This is the chalice of my blood, the blood of the new and eternal covenant, the mystery of faith, which will be poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.” The earliest versions of the Roman Canon did not include the words *mysterium fidei*. They appeared by the seventh century and universally in the 1474 missal. The study group wanted to remove them. Pope Paul approved it, but personally suggested that the same words introduce the people’s acclamation. In the schemata of 1968, the two words appear in both places - within the consecration and to introduce the acclamation.⁷ But they disappeared from the consecration in the final edition. For the first time in many centuries, the Roman Missal changed the words for consecrating wine.

Why did these words start appearing in the seventh century? An appealing theory concerns a passage in the pastoral epistles. Church leadership had diversified into groups including deacons. Paul writes to Timothy, “Similarly, deacons must be dignified, not deceitful, not addicted to drink, not greedy for sordid gain, holding fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience” (1 Tim 3:9). Deacons hold fast to the mystery of faith.

In time, diaconal liturgical ministry encompassed actions with the chalice: Deacons add water to the wine. Deacons lift the chalice at the end of the eucharistic prayer. Deacons administer communion from the chalice. Deacons may purify the vessels, including the chalice.

Another tradition compares deacons with angels. At the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry, when he was tempted in the desert, angels ministered to him; the Greek for “minister” is a cognate to “deacon” (Matt 4:11). At his Passion, when Jesus prayed for the cup to be taken away, an angel appeared to strengthen him as drops of his blood fell onto the ground (Luke 22:42-44). In Christian art, angels sometimes wear dalmatic and stole, or they hover at the crucifixion bearing cups to catch the blood dripping from the hands of Christ. Possibly, someone familiar with the connections among deacons, angels and the Blood of Christ inserted Paul’s words to deacons (“the mystery of faith”) into the consecration of the chalice.

In the Anaphora of St. James, the deacons cue the acclamation: “We believe and we profess.” But deacons do not introduce it in the Latin Rite. Deacons invite actions, such as changing posture, giving the sign of peace, or announcing the dismissal. Priests, however, pray.

The Order of Mass envisions this acclamation as a dialogue between the priest and the people. The priest is not to take part in the acclamation any more than he is to say “And with your spirit” to his own greeting. In the first English translation, the priest said, “Let us proclaim the mystery of faith,” including himself in the proclamation to come. But the Latin never saw it that way.

⁷ Barba, p. 743.

Abandoning the plan for a single acclamation with permission to devise others, the study group added two more. The first of these also derived from the Anaphora of St. James, where it referred to First Corinthians. This put Paul's testimony onto the lips of people at the present eucharist: "When we eat this bread and drink this Cup, we proclaim your death, O Lord, until you come again."

After the people's acclamation, the priest continues his part of the anamnesis. He says next of Jesus, for example, "as we celebrate the memorial of his Death and Resurrection." It sounds as if the priest has not listened to the people. However, the people have addressed Christ, while the priest continues praying to the Father.

The Second Vatican Council underscored that Christ is present at the eucharist in four distinct ways: in the person of the minister, in the eucharist, in the word, and when the Church prays and sings.⁸ The dialogues draw out these points. At the end of the gospel, the deacon or the priest declares, "The Gospel of the Lord." The people respond not to him but to the one whose word they heard. They say, "Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ." Not, "Nice job, Deacon Benedict."

In the *Dominus vobiscum* dialogue, the priest or deacon recognizes the presence of Christ in the gathered assembly, and the people recognize Christ in their minister. "The Lord be with you." "And [the Lord be] with your spirit."

Most sublime among these is the memorial acclamation. As the people recognize Christ present in the proclaimed gospel, so they recognize him in the consecrated bread and wine: "We proclaim your death, O Lord."

This best explains why the popular memorial acclamation "Christ has died" did not survive the final cut for the revised missal. It's a fine acclamation about Jesus Christ, but it is not addressed to him.

Which brings us to the unique situation of the Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children (EPMC). A slightly revised English translation appeared separately from the third edition of the missal on the strange argument that the *editio typica* excluded these eucharistic prayers. (The *missale* had to leave them out lest some priest try to lead a children's prayer in Latin. The whole point was to make them available only in the vernacular.)

In the original English translation of all three prayers the *priest* - not the people - initiated the anamnesis after the institution narrative. In EPMC I, he began, "We do now what Jesus told us to do. We remember his Death and his Resurrection...." Then he invited the people's acclamation with an introduction different from the missal's other eucharistic prayers. Instead of "The mystery of faith," which might puzzle children, he said, "Let us proclaim our faith." By addressing the people, he interrupted his words to the Father. He also included himself in the upcoming acclamation. EPMC I has always put next the memorial acclamations of the missal's other eucharistic prayers.

But not EPMC II and III. These took a unique approach to the people's acclamation. They completely set aside the ones in force for EPMC I and the

⁸ *Sacrosanctum concilium* 7.

missal's other prayers and pioneered their own. In the original translation of EPMC II, the presider's anamnesis begins, "And so, loving Father, we remember that Jesus died and rose...." Then the people sing, "We praise you, we bless you, we thank you" - without specifying who "you" is. One would expect "you" to mean Christ - not the Father, and certainly not the priest.⁹ But here, because the priest's last word was "you", the people are addressing the Father.

In the original EPMC III, the priest begins the anamnesis. ("God our Father, we remember with joy all that Jesus did to save us....") The people's acclamation - this time in the third person - punctuates his words three times: "Glory to God in the highest." The structure of this anamnesis avoids the repetitious content between priest and people, though it sacrifices an acclamation made to Christ and cuts the weave of the priest's prayer to the Father.

Now the Vatican's *editio typica* of EPMC has drawn the memorial acclamations from the missal's other eucharistic prayers into II and III. In both of these, after the institution narrative, the priest issues the invitation from EPMC I, "Let us proclaim our faith," and the people now respond with one of the three standard acclamations. Then he continues as before, beginning with his own anamnesis and the people's additional acclamations. This duplicated anamnesis mimics the pattern in the main eucharistic prayers.

Perhaps the Vatican added these acclamations to obtain uniformity and foster participation. The addition solves a pastoral difficulty: Musical settings of the EPMC are scarce, making the prayers difficult to execute. Adding the standard acclamations makes the EPMC more user-friendly. But one wonders if a later generation of authorities incorrectly interpreted the original structure of the anamnesis in EPMC II and III.

The diverse styles originally conceived for the EPMC probably would have appealed to members of the Study Group 10 who created the memorial acclamation. They originally hoped that regional authorities would develop their own.

Diversity remains, however, because the Vatican approved the English translation of the same EPMC for the United States without adding the standard acclamations in II and III. The original concept of EPMC II and III created more engaging dialogue between priest and people and eliminated the duplication of the anamnesis. But the insertion of the other acclamations lends uniformity to the eucharistic prayers and animates the people to address Jesus Christ. Perhaps both solutions have value.

Addressed to the Father in thanksgiving, the lengthy prayer of thanksgiving sets the table for the eucharist banquet. Midway, it pauses for a moment after the institution narrative so that all may encounter the wonder of what just happened. The priest shows the consecrated bread and chalice to the people. Sometimes someone rings a bell and someone swings incense. Some

⁹ What follows in English differs from the Latin. See my blog post <https://paulturner.org/childrens-eucharistic-prayers-2/>.

priests prolong their adoration. But such actions are not as integral as the anamnesis that follows. Having already encountered Christ in the minister, the assembly and the word, the people now encounter him most profoundly in the eucharist. In that moment of sublime loveliness, hungering for communion, the adults and children break their silent awe and sing.

Paul Turner is pastor of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, where he also serves as director for the Office of Divine Worship.

“The Amen Corner: The Voices of Children.” *Worship* 93 (October 2019):292-298.