

**MAGIC  
AND  
CONSECRATION**

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## Magic and Consecration

It has been said jocularly that prostitution is the world's oldest profession, but that is not quite true. In fact, *priesthood* is the world's oldest profession, and it goes back into the very earliest moments of human existence (often, in its earliest days, it was closely allied with temple prostitution!). Indeed, the oldest surviving archeological evidences of humanity seem to have to do with religion and its concern with death and the afterlife.

But priesthood had another frequent (and usually unwelcome) counterpart in human history: it was witchcraft. In its simplest definition, *witchcraft* can be defined as "the ability to bring about change in the natural world by the uttering of a formula of magic words" (as the great Harry Potter books have most recently demonstrated). Over the centuries, these "magic" words have often been popularly referred to as "abracadabra" or "mumbo jumbo" or "hocus pocus".<sup>1</sup>

An important point is that in the practice of witchcraft it is the witch or the warlock who is responsible for the magical change, because it is she or he who knows and can pronounce the causal words.

It is this author's contention that the Western Church moved very subtly and over a long period of time into a position in which the consecration of the bread and wine of the Eucharist came more and more to be seen as an incantation of virtual witchcraft, and that the time has come to repudiate that tradition.

In Catholic Christian tradition certainly the greatest and most primal change in "the nature of things" could be said to be the transformations wrought by the Church's sacramental liturgies, most notably (for our purposes) the transformation of the oblations of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist. At least until the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformations, virtually all of Christendom – East and West – generally agreed that given the proper minister, the proper intention, the proper matter, and the proper form, the Real Presence of Christ<sup>2</sup> was "confectured" (a Conciliar term) in the celebration of the Eucharist. Classically, it was broadly understood that the "proper minister" was a bishop or priest in apostolic succession; the "proper intention" was that the celebrant meant to do "what the Church does"; the "proper matter" was wheaten bread and wine fermented from grapes.

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<sup>1</sup> While some etymologists contest his opinion, John Tillotson (Archbishop of Canterbury 1691-1694) claimed that the very words "hocus pocus" were merely a corruption of the Latin words *hoc est (enim) corpus (meum)*, "this is my body", from the Latin Mass. And, according to some scholars, the word "abracadabra" is a distortion of a series of Hebrew words whose meaning could be construed as "Father, Son, and Spirit". The origins of "mumbo jumbo" are less clear, but it is thought to have been a 19<sup>th</sup> century English derogation of the chants of an African shaman. (Quinon, Michael; *World Wide Words*; [www.worldwidewords.org/weird words/ ww-hoc1.htm](http://www.worldwidewords.org/weird%20words/ww-hoc1.htm))

<sup>2</sup> Various efforts at specifically defining this "Real Presence" may have arisen in history, but they are not germane to our subject.

But definition of the *proper form* was a somewhat less clear matter, and this lack of clarity arose from Western Christendom's (typical) efforts to identify and formally assert the precise moment in the liturgy of the Holy Eucharist when the sacramental transformation of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ actually occurred. This kind of "codification of mystery" was extremely common in the Western Church, leading, for instance, to the formal canonization of such things as the "doctrine" of transubstantiation (a definition *not* of the Sacramental Presence, but of the specific metaphysical means by which it presumably takes place), and, even more specifically, the "infallible" declaration that it was specifically the repetition of the Words of Institution from the Last Supper which effected the sacramental transformation of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ.<sup>3</sup> The Eastern Churches, generally more open and accepting of the mystical dimensions of religion, have tended to codify such matters much less frequently and certainly much less narrowly than their Western counterpart.

It was said and believed, of course, that the Words of Institution were the repetition of the words of Christ at the Last Supper. However, the current Words of Institution as they appear in the Great Thanksgiving (BCP) are not taken from any single New Testament account of the consecration, but are a combination of elements of the four different biblical accounts and one brief addition (my translations from the Greek):

Rite II: BCP 1979<sup>4</sup> – "Take, eat: this is my Body, which is given for you.  
Do this for the remembrance of me"  
"Drink this, all of you: This is my Blood of the new  
Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the  
forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it,  
do this for the remembrance of me."

Matthew 26:26-28 – "Take, eat; this is my body"  
(70-80 CE) "Drink of it, all, for this is my blood of the covenant, being  
shed for many for the forgiveness of sins."

Mark 14:22-24 – "Take; this is my body."  
(ca. 64 CE) "This is my blood of the covenant, shed for many."

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<sup>3</sup> The council of Florence in 1439 declared: "The words of the Savior, by which He instituted this sacrament, are the form of this sacrament; for the priest speaking in the person of Christ effects this sacrament. For by the power of the very words the substance of the bread is changed into the body of Christ, and the substance of the wine into the blood...". *Decree for the Armenians. 1439*

The Council of Trent (1545-1563) not only codified the teaching of the Real Presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, but specifically reiterated that the recitation of the Words of Institution as the specific point of consecration.

<sup>4</sup> The words occur in the BCP Eucharist Rite I, as well, but with the Cranmerian word order.

- Luke 22:17-20 – (The cup) “Take this and share it among yourselves...”  
(70-85 CE) “This is my body given for you; do this for my memorial”
- 1 Cor. 11:24-25 – “This is my body, on your behalf.  
(ca. 57 CE) Do this for my remembrance.”  
“This cup is the new covenant in my blood.  
Do this whenever you drink it, for my remembrance.”
- Rite II: BCP 1979 – Take, (Mt, Mk)  
(with NT citations) eat: (Mt)  
this is my Body, (Mt, Mk, Lk, Co)  
which is given for you. (Lk)  
Do this for the remembrance of me” (Lk, Co)  
Drink this, (Mt, Lk?)  
all of you: (Mt.)  
This is my Blood (Mt, Mk, Co?)  
of the new (Co)  
Covenant, (Mt, Mk, Co)  
which is shed for you (None)  
and for many (Mt, Mk)  
for the forgiveness of sins. (Mt)  
Whenever you drink it, (Co)  
do this for the remembrance of me. (Co)

Given this variety, it must have been true that before the Canon of these New Testament texts was settled, there had been a *great* many celebrations of the Eucharist with what would now be considered “imperfect” Words of Institution – indeed, some Eucharistic liturgies had *no* Words of Institution at all.<sup>5</sup> (And, even in the BCP liturgy, the words over the chalice – “which is shed for you” – do not appear in generally accepted Greek texts of Scripture.<sup>6</sup>)

In addition, given this four-fold variety of the biblical versions of the Words of Institution, it is impossible to know the *actual* words Jesus used at the Last Supper. The words “This is my body” are common to the four accounts, but that cannot be said for the words “This is my blood” (which are missing from the *received* Lukan text).

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<sup>5</sup> For an example, see the Liturgy of Addai and Mari of the Assyrian Church – the oldest Eucharistic Liturgy still in use (Gelston, Anthony; *The Eucharistic Prayer of Addai and Mari*; Clarendon Press; Oxford; 1992.) and recently approved as valid by the Vatican.

<sup>6</sup> The words appear in at least one ancient text, but not in the generally received text of Luke.

Finally, while this is not the place to undertake an entire history of the Eucharistic liturgy, we must understand that the belief that the Words of Institution are the essential form of consecration is a somewhat late development. For instance, in *all* known ancient Christian Eucharistic liturgies, there was a classic *epiclesis*, a prayer “calling down the Holy Spirit” upon the bread and wine that they might become the Body and Blood of Christ.<sup>7</sup> This was originally a common element in all liturgies – both in the East and in the West. But an *epiclesis* remained in the *Roman* liturgy only — at the very latest — until Pope Gelasius (492-6).<sup>8</sup>

Robert F. Taft, S.J., professor emeritus at the Pontifical Oriental Institute, Rome, and consulter of the Vatican Congregation for the Oriental Churches, wrote recently: ...{T}he consensus of the best representative contemporary Catholic scholars...agree that the institution narrative is a later interpolation into the earliest eucharistic prayers. Not only Addai and Mari but 10 or more other early eucharistic prayers also lack these words, including the so-called *Apostolic Tradition*, whose institution narrative was probably added not earlier than the fourth century. So there is not a single extant pre-Nicene eucharistic prayer that one can prove contained the words of institution.”<sup>9</sup>

Most responsible scholars agree that this disappearance of the *epiclesis* from the Roman Rite and the ascendancy in importance of the Words of Institution probably occurred because of the emerging concept of the Mass as a “sacrifice” carried out exclusively at the hands of the celebrating priest.<sup>10</sup> And, as Western medieval Eucharistic theology developed further and the Mass was universally changed into Latin (i.e., incomprehensible to the assembly), the Eucharist came to be seen less as a communal liturgy of the Christian assembly<sup>11</sup> than as a “private” sacrificial function of a priest at which the assembly were merely observers. It gradually became “magic” – a set of occult and commonly-unavailable words spoken only by an individual who by his ceremonial ordination had been invested with unique mystical powers.

By that time in history, a priest was still forbidden to celebrate Mass without a congregation – the last remnant of the ancient understanding that the Eucharist was an action of

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<sup>7</sup> An example from the Liturgy of St. Maruthas of Maiferkat (circa A.D. 390): “May He (the Holy Spirit) change this simple bread and make it the very Body which was immolated for us on the cross for the remission of sins and the eternal life of those receiving it.”

<sup>8</sup> Most scholars think that the *epiclesis* had disappeared from the Roman Rite by his time, but although we have no further liturgical textual reference to an *epiklesis*, Gelasius made a possible reference to it when he wrote: “How shall the Heavenly Spirit, when He is invoked to consecrate the divine mystery, come, if the priest and he who prays Him to come is guilty of bad actions?” (Ep., vii; Thiel, Ep. Rom. Pont., I, 486) This is the *last* hint – and it is only a hint – of an *epiclesis* in the Roman Rite.

<sup>9</sup> America Magazine; Vol. 188 No. 16; May 12, 2003.

<sup>10</sup> In his book *For the Life of the World* (the section on Sacrament and Symbol, pp. 144-145) Fr. Alexander Schmemmann has called this “...the collapse, or rather the suicide, of sacramental theology”.

<sup>11</sup> Liturgy = Greek *leit ergos* = “work of the people”.

*the entire assembly* for which the priest served merely as a spokesperson. And the “Great Amen” at the end of the consecration prayer – the assent of the assembly to the priest’s words and actions – (which St. Jerome said had once echoed through the streets of Rome and which one early writer claimed to be the essential conclusion of the Consecration) became almost insignificant.

Consequently, the celebration of the Eucharist and the consecration of the bread and wine at Mass came to fulfill the customary definition of “witchcraft”... “the ability to bring about change in the natural world by the uttering of a formula of magic words”.<sup>12</sup>

During all these centuries, the Eastern Orthodox Churches maintained the ancient *epiclesis* in its liturgies and considered that prayer (which called down the Holy Spirit upon the elements) to be essential to consecration. “[The change] comes by the mode of prayers. It is not submitted to a *moment* of consecration, but we climb to this consecration through the will of Christ, through the prayers of the Liturgy, since the Liturgy is one whole knit prayer culminating in bringing to the believer salvation through the Sacrament of Holy Communion...For the Greek Fathers it was a whole act of mysterious reality: a climax affair.”<sup>13</sup> “[The epiclesis] reflects the prevailing sacramental theology of the Eastern Church, which interprets the effectiveness of the sacraments as an answer of God to the prayer of the church rather than as a result of the vicarious powers of a priest pronouncing the appropriate formula.”<sup>14</sup>

In 1704, the Episcopal Church of Scotland became independent from the Church of England and elected its first Primus (i.e., Primate). For a time it used the old Scottish *Booke of Common Prayer* of 1637 (Archbishop Laud’s book), but in 1764, the Scottish Church compiled and published its own *Book of Common Prayer*. In the Eucharistic prayer of consecration, it included the following paragraph (which had not been in the English Prayer Book) and identified it “The Invocation” (English for *epiclesis*):

“And we most humbly beseech thee, O merciful Father to hear us, and of thy almighty goodness vouchsafe to bless and sanctify, with thy word and Holy Spirit, these thy gifts and creatures of bread and wine, that they may become the body and blood of thy most dearly beloved Son.”

Following the traditions of the Eastern Churches, the Scottish Church believed and taught that it was this Invocation which effected the transformation of the bread and wine

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<sup>12</sup> Professor Gary Macy of the (Catholic) University of San Diego, speaking at the North American Academy of Liturgy in 2003 said: ...[[It was only during that [12<sup>th</sup>] century that the words of consecration were definitely accepted as the effective means of consecration during the Mass. The result of these developments was the creation of those who served as the altar as a separate caste with powers available to no other ministry of the Church.”

<sup>13</sup> Ziton, Fr. Theodore; “The Epiclesis of the Divine Liturgy” at Orthodox Research Institute; from <info@orthodoxresearchinstitute.org.>

<sup>14</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica on line; [www.britannica.com/eb/article-9032781](http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9032781) (01/10/06)

into the Body and Blood of Christ.

In 1784, when Samuel Seabury received consecration as the first bishop in the American Episcopal Church, he agreed with the Scottish bishops who consecrated him that he would do everything he could to see that the Invocation (and some other material) was included in the American *Book of Common Prayer*.<sup>15</sup> In the Episcopal Church, the proposed (1786) *Book of Common Prayer* (in the compilation of which Bishop Seabury had no hand) was lacking the Invocation prayer (and also the Nicene Creed!), but Seabury made such a case for inclusion of the prayer that both the diocese of Maryland and Pennsylvania immediately supported him, and consequently in the first official edition of the *Book* (1789), the Invocation was included in the Communion Office.<sup>16</sup>

In his arguments Seabury's major point was that the Words of Institution alone are *not even a prayer*. They do not ask God to do anything, and consequently without the Invocation they seem to suggest that the Real Presence occurs only because of some occult capability *on the priest's part alone*. It could also be argued that even Jesus himself did not consider the Words of Institution to be an actual blessing, since in all Gospel accounts, Jesus *first* (and separately) blesses (or "gave thanks for") the bread and wine *before* speaking the familiar "words of institution".

Of course, the Roman Catholic Church continued (and continues today<sup>17</sup>) to teach that it is specifically the Words of Institution that "cause" the transformation<sup>18</sup> and the Eastern

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<sup>15</sup> The exact terms of Seabury's commitment to the Scottish Bishops read as follows: "As the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, or the administration of the sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ, is the principal bond of union among Christians, as well as the most solemn act of worship in the Christian Church, the Bishops aforesaid (viz. the Bishops of the Church of Scotland) agree in desiring that there should be as little variance here as possible. And though the Scottish Bishops are very far from prescribing to their brethren in this matter, they cannot help ardently wishing that Bishop Seabury would endeavour all he can, consistently with peace and prudence, to make the celebration of this venerable mystery conformable to the most primitive doctrine and practice in that respect, which is the pattern the Church of Scotland has copied after in her Communion Office..."

<sup>16</sup> Seabury's letter to William White, 1786: "The grand fault in that [Communion] office is the deficiency of a more formal oblation of the Elements, and of the invocation of the Holy Ghost to sanctify and bless them. The Consecration is made to consist merely in the Priest's laying his hand on the Elements and pronouncing 'This is my body etc.' which words are not consecratory at all—nor were they addressed by Christ to the Father—but were declarative to the Apostles. This is so exactly symbolizing with the Church of Rome in an error..."

<sup>17</sup> The Baltimore Catechism, Lesson 26: "Q. 893. How do the priests exercise this power of changing bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ? A. The priests exercise this power of changing bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ through the words of consecration in the Mass, which are words of Christ: "This is my body; this is my blood." (Note: it is the *priests*, not God, who effect the change!)

<sup>18</sup> In 1570, Pope Pius V wrote in *De Defectibus*, Part V: "The words of Consecration, which are the form of the Sacrament, are these: 'This is the chalice of my Blood, of the new and eternal testament, the mystery of faith, which shall be shed for you and for many unto the remission of sins'."

Churches continue to teach that it is the *epiclesis* that effects the change in their liturgies of St. John Chrysostom, St. Basil, and St. James.<sup>19</sup> Specifically in the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, the following words are prayed:

Priest: Send down Your Holy Spirit upon us and upon these gifts here set before You and make this bread the precious Body of Your Christ.

People: Amen.

Priest: And what is in this cup the precious Blood of Your Christ.

People: Amen.

Priest: Changing them by Your Holy Spirit.

People: Amen. Amen. Amen.

It is evident that not only does this ancient responsive *epiclesis* clearly intend to indicate the moment of sacramental transformation, but with its repeated congregational assents it also shows clearly that the consecration itself is not merely the "private" purview of the priest, but involves the action and concurrence of the entire assembly.

Since the Anglican Tradition itself has nowhere expressed a formal stance regarding the moment of consecration in the Eucharist, and faced with the frequent contradiction between the Catholic and Orthodox positions regarding the moment of the Eucharistic transformation, it seems that the road of both ecumenical charity and liturgical wisdom is to hold with most ancient and contemporary experts that in our limited humanity we sim-

A question or *dubium* regarding the matter received a response dated March 8, 1957 from the Holy Office, as it was then called. The consultative vote of the cardinal members of the Holy Office on this matter, ratified ten days later by Pope Pius XII, established that "it is by the institution of Christ that he alone validly celebrates who pronounces the consecratory words."

"In the *institution narrative*, the power of the words and the action of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit, make sacramentally present under the species of bread and wine Christ's body and blood, his sacrifice offered on the cross once for all. (§ #1353; Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1997).

<sup>19</sup> "Epiklesis. (Gr. Epiklesis) Special prayer or petition by the Priest to "invoke" or to call upon the Holy Spirit, in order that God's Grace will descend for the consecration of the Holy Gifts at the Eucharist." (Litsas, Fotius K.; *A Dictionary of Orthodox Terminology*; [http://www.fatheralexander.org/booklets/english/dictionary\\_terminology.htm](http://www.fatheralexander.org/booklets/english/dictionary_terminology.htm))

"They [the Orthodox] are not particularly interested in the precise moment the change occurs, although this "change" or "fulfillment" of the bread and wine is usually identified with the Epiklesis." (Wikipedia).

"And then [the priest] and the entire congregation pray for the descent of the Holy Spirit to consecrate the bread and wine. From this moment the Eucharistic bread and wine are worshiped as the presence of Christ himself." (MSN Encarta).

"In the East, however, the culminating point of the prayer is not in the remembrance of Christ's act but in the invocation of the **Holy Spirit**, which immediately follows: "Send down Thy Holy Spirit upon us and upon the Gifts here spread forth, and make this bread to be the precious Body of Thy Christ. . . ." Thus, the central mystery of Christianity is seen as being performed by the prayer of the church and through an invocation of the Spirit." (Encyclopedia Britannica)

ply *cannot know* uncontrovertibly the exact moment when the sacramental transformation takes place, but that we *can know* with certainty from both liturgical history and theology that it is *the Great Thanksgiving itself* – i.e., the entire prayer – which effects the consecration.

Consequently, it seems the higher liturgical wisdom to withhold whatever reverences we are accustomed to show to the Sacramental Presence (i.e., genuflections and elevations, compression of thumb and forefinger, etc.) until the conclusion of the Great Thanksgiving prayer — and, indeed, until the congregational assent to the consecratory prayer takes place with the Great Amen. This relieves the Church of charges of hypercodification – and witchcraft.

This position has the increasing support of liturgical scholars from all traditions, and represents the most informed contemporary liturgical insights. In a recent comment, Father Taft wrote: “This [acceptance by the Vatican of a Eucharistic liturgy without the Words of Institution] moves us beyond a medieval theology of magic words.”<sup>20</sup>

This also surely helps in the reformation and recasting of the idea of priesthood, moving away from the medieval idea of the priest as a privileged thaumaturgical conjurer into the ancient attitude of the priest as simply the one chosen and ordained to preside and to serve as the designated liturgical hands and voice of the assembly.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *National Catholic Reporter*; November 16, 2001.

<sup>21</sup> Note the following:

- (1) The great liturgist Joseph A. Jungmann S.J. sums up the original tradition of the church as follows: “In general, Christian antiquity, even until way into the Middle Ages, manifested no particular interest regarding the determination of the precise moment of the consecration. Often reference was made merely to the entire Eucharistic prayer.” (*The Mass*, Liturgical Press: Collegeville, MN, 1975)
- (2) The famous pro-Anglican Catholic apologist, Jacques-Benigne Bossuet (1627-1704), said: “The intent of liturgies, and, in general, of consecratory prayers, is not to focus our attention on precise moments, but to have us attend to the action in its entirety and to its complete effect...” (Bossuet, J B; *History of the Protestant Variations*; D & J Sadlier; NY; 1845.)
- (3) The new Roman Catholic Catechism (§§ 1352, 1376) seems to reflect a broader approach that suggests that the entire core of the anaphora – not just some segment of it – is consecratory.
- (4) 1982 Munich Statement of the Orthodox-Catholic Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue (I, 6): “...the Eucharistic mystery is accomplished in the prayer which *joins together* the words by which the Word made flesh instituted the sacrament and the epiclesis in which the church, moved by faith, entrusts the Father, through the Son, to send the Spirit...”
- (5) The World Council of Churches’ document on “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry” (Faith and Order Paper 111) states: “...In the early liturgies the whole ‘prayer action’ was thought of as bringing about the reality promised by Christ. The invocation of the Spirit was made both on the community and on the elements of bread and wine. Recovery of such an understanding may help us overcome our difficulties concerning a special moment of consecration.” (*Commentary E14*)
- (6) The Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission Report #1 states: “According to the traditional order of the liturgy the consecratory prayer (anaphora) leads to the communion of the faithful. Through this prayer of thanksgiving, a word of faith addressed to the Father, the bread and wine become the

Avoiding the mechanistic and the effort to define the exact empirical moment of consecration, we might remember the words of Bishop Lancelot Andrewes in his disputation with the Jesuit Bellarmine: "We believe no less than you that the presence is real: but concerning the method of the presence we do not rashly define anything."<sup>22</sup>

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Quinon, Michael; *World Wide Words*; <<[http://www.worldwidewords.org/weird\\_words/wwhoc1.htm](http://www.worldwidewords.org/weird_words/wwhoc1.htm)>>

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body and blood of Christ by the action of the Holy Spirit, so that in communion we eat the flesh of Christ and drink his blood." (*"The Presence of Christ" Article 10*)

- (7) "Historically, the 'moment of consecration' at the Eucharist was considered to be the institution narrative in the western church. Some eastern churches understood the epiclesis (invocation of the Holy Spirit) to be the moment of consecration. However, the Eucharistic prayer (including institution narrative and epiclesis) is now understood to be a single text, with the consecration completed as the Eucharistic prayer concludes with the people's Great Amen." *The Episcopal Church Commission on Liturgy and Music*.

<sup>22</sup> *Tortura Torti*, 1609.