

A Review of *The Lamb's Supper—The Mass as Heaven on Earth*
by Dr. Scott Hahn (New York: Doubleday, 1999, pp.174)

Introduction

A priest I have known for many years told me recently that he had read “*The Lamb's Supper*” by Dr. Scott Hahn and that it was all true. Knowing that I am a student of the Book of Revelation, he went on to tell me that the Mass is the fulfillment of all the prophecies in that Book and that there is nothing more to expect in the future. Before I had finished objecting, he put me to the test by asking: “What then do you think of the Mass?” After a short pause, I answered “I believe the Mass is the divine means given to the faithful to help them attain the fulfillment of all things, which still lies in the future”. His response was sudden, short and sharp: “Heretic!” Just a few hundred years ago, the priest would then say “may your body burn in the flames so that your soul may be saved”. Nowadays, the utterance of this terrible word just brings the conversation, and the relationship, to a very abrupt conclusion. However, its mediaeval undercurrents are still strong. They plunge me into a mental trial, where I am defending myself against the expanding influence of Dr. Scott Hahn, the Steubenville Professor whose book “*The Lamb's Supper*” has convinced so many of its orthodoxy, especially in its views on the Book of Revelation.

Before studying “*The Lamb's Supper*” to understand its alluring message, I first seek reassurance from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*. Again and again, the Eucharistic Mass is described as a pledge and an anticipation: it is “a pledge of the life to come” (CCC 1402), and an anticipation of “eternal life” (1326), of “the wedding feast of the Lamb in the heavenly Jerusalem” (1329), of “the final Passover of the Church in the glory of the kingdom” (1340) and of “the heavenly glory” (1402). If the Mass is a pledge or anticipation of all these promises, one wonders how it can also be considered their fulfillment. And since the celebration of the Mass will cease with Christ's return (1337, 1341, 1344), one is surely justified in saying that it is not the fulfillment itself, but only a means to this end: “Therefore we celebrate the Eucharist ‘awaiting the blessed hope and the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ’” (1404). My definition of the Mass is not so heretical after all. But how could the priest be so sure that it was? This leads us back to the growing influence of Dr. Scott Hahn's popular little book “*The Lamb's Supper—The Mass as Heaven on Earth*”.

In the Foreword he has written for this book, Fr. Benedict Groeschel C.F.R. praises it highly for bringing together several powerful spiritual realities in a new way—a way that relates the daily Mass with the eschatological dimension of Christian life described in the Book of Revelation (p. xi). He notes that this relationship is based on the Eucharist's reflection of the heavenly worship described in the Book of Revelation. So far so good, but when Fr. Groeschel then says “The Mass on earth is the presentation of the marriage supper of the Lamb” (p. xiii, cf. xv) the alarm bells ring, warning us of a total merging of the ‘now’ and the ‘not yet’ of Christian expectation. It is one thing to refer to the Mass as an ‘anticipation’ of the Lamb's marriage supper, as does the Catechism (CCC 1329), but it is an entirely different thing to call it ‘the presentation’ of this feast, as does Fr. Groeschel. Since the Book of Revelation describes the marriage supper of the Lamb as a sequel to the Second Coming of Christ (Rev 19,6-9), one wonders whether Fr. Groeschel is suggesting that the Second Coming has already taken place. Does he need to be reminded that at the very same Mass, we continue to recite the Creed, in which we acknowledge the Second Coming as a future event? Indeed, according to the Catechism, there will be no Mass at all after the Second Coming, since the Church will celebrate the Mass only ‘until Christ returns’ (CCC 1337, 1341, 1344). So just as Fr. Groeschel feels a ‘twinge of annoyance’ when the Mass is listed as a ‘religious service’ (p. xii), so we feel a ‘twinge of annoyance’, and more, when he describes the Mass as

‘the presentation’ of the marriage supper of the Lamb. And in case you think that Fr. Groeschel may have misread the author’s text on this point, you will be disappointed. In the first chapter, Scott Hahn reports that, at his first attendance of Mass, he immediately knew where he was: “I was at the marriage feast that John describes at the end of that very last book of the Bible” (p.9). Again, at the end of the first part, the author affirms that when the faithful receive the host at Holy Communion, they are already taken up into heaven to join with the heavenly throng in the marriage supper of the Lamb (p.57), and he adds “This is not a metaphor”. Before studying closely the form and content of this book, Fr. Groeschel’s Foreword has warned us to expect a serious loss of temporal perspective in its understanding of the Book of Revelation.

The First Part

The book is divided into three parts: the first focuses on the liturgy of the Mass, the second interprets the Book of Revelation and the third returns to the Mass with the findings of the second part. A glance at the section headings shows an author with a penchant for puns. One wonders, though, whether this frivolity with words is appropriate in a book on Sacramental theology and Scriptural interpretation.

Part One opens with the hypothesis that the author sets out to prove in this book: “Well, in this little book, I’d like to propose something outlandish. I propose that the key to understanding the Mass is the biblical Book of Revelation—and, further, that the Mass is the only way a Christian can truly make sense of the Book of Revelation” (p.4). He warns us not to expect a Bible study, but rather “the practical application of just one aspect of the Book of Revelation”, which, although not-exhaustive, will help us to see the Mass with new eyes (p.5-6). After reading this introduction, one is left with the impression that the book is actually more concerned with the Mass than with the Book of Revelation, of which it professes to deal with only one aspect. Readers should therefore reflect on this before basing themselves entirely on this book for their interpretation of Revelation. What follows, though, may explain why readers have a special regard, even reverence, for the contents of this little book.

In the first chapter, the experience that led to the author’s ‘outlandish’ hypothesis is movingly recounted in what can best be described as a personal testimony of his conversion to the Catholic Faith. As an evangelical Calvinist, for whom the Mass was ‘the ultimate sacrilege a human could commit’ (p.8), he was driven by curiosity to attend Mass at a local church. Then, at his first attendance, as the priest raised the host and pronounced the words of consecration, he recalls how he “felt a prayer surge from my heart in a whisper: “*My Lord and My God. That’s really you!*””(p.8). From a position of such extreme hostility to the Mass, it must have been an extraordinary work of grace that brought the author to this confession. And only a few intense seconds later, he received the intuition that inspired this book: “From long years of studying the Book of Revelation, I immediately knew where I was...I was at the marriage feast that John describes at the end of that very last book of the Bible. I was before the throne of heaven, where Jesus is hailed forever as the Lamb. I wasn’t ready for this, though—I was at Mass!” (p.9).

Subsequent visits to the Mass only confirmed and deepened this intuition: “Yet no book was as visible to me, in that dark chapel, as the Book of Revelation, the Apocalypse, which describes the worship of the angels and saints in heaven. As in that book, so in the chapel, I saw robed priests, an altar, a congregation chanting “holy, holy, holy.” I saw the smoke of incense; I heard the invocation of angels and saints; I myself sang the alleluias; for I was drawn ever more into this worship...I hardly knew which way to turn—toward the action

in the Apocalypse or the action at the altar. More and more, they seemed to be the very same action.” (p.9).

With its origin so closely bound up with Eucharistic grace, the reader is strongly inclined to regard the author’s intuition as divinely inspired and so, too, its development in this book. This may explain why, for some devout readers, the views expressed here have become a matter of faith and a test of orthodoxy. The book not only has the Imprimatur of the local Bishop, but it has also been promoted on the website of an influential Catholic Media Organization (EWTN). So, it is not surprising that for many Catholics, “*The Lamb’s Supper*” is now the surest guide to understanding the Book of Revelation. And as if divine inspiration and the Imprimatur are not enough, the author then goes on to cite the Fathers of the Church and the Second Vatican Council in his support. It should be noted, though, that the passage he quotes from the Vatican Council document, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, does not identify the earthly liturgy with the eschatological marriage supper of the Lamb; it simply says, as in the Catechism, that the Mass is “a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the Holy City of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims” (p.11).

If the author’s original intuition had just highlighted what is common between the liturgy of the Mass and the heavenly liturgy described in Revelation, it could be acknowledged and welcomed. However, from statements in the text so far, his intuition appears to be more specific: it identifies the liturgy of the Mass with the very last events of the heavenly liturgy of Revelation—the Second Coming and the marriage supper of the Lamb. At some stage in the articulation of this intuition an extreme form of ‘realized eschatology’ has crept in, revealing itself more fully in the second and third parts of this book.

In the remaining chapters of Part One, the author gives us an overview of the Mass, taking us through the Biblical story of Sacrifice (ch.2), the origin, significance and development of the Mass in the early Church (ch.3), and all the different parts of the Mass as it is celebrated today (ch.4). These chapters make edifying reading for all the faithful and there is nothing here to cause alarm. On reading these chapters, though, one wonders whether the first part of the author’s hypothesis, that the key to understanding the Mass is to be found in the Book of Revelation (p.4), is really justified. From the details given in this part of the book (p.22-26), one gets the impression that the key to understanding the Mass is to be found in the Passover tradition of the Jews and in the Gospel accounts of the Last Supper. The Mass and the Book of Revelation may have liturgical features in common, but whereas the Mass reflects the Jewish Passover, the Book of Revelation recalls a different liturgy in the Jewish matrix of Christianity—the daily morning service in the ancient Temple, on the Day of Atonement.

The Second Part

Part two consists of four chapters focusing on the Book of Revelation. In chapter one, Dr. Hahn invites us to come with him on an investigation of the “sense amid the strangeness” of the Book of Revelation (p.62), which in all its parts “seems to defy common sense and good taste” (p.61). He warns us, first, that “the book lacks the ordering principles of a literary work”, although I find this hard to accept in view of the four sequential series of septets narrated in the text: the seven messages that are followed by the breaking of a series of seven seals, which lead to the sounding of a series of seven trumpets, which terminate with the outpouring of a series of seven bowls. Since this basic structure of the Book of Revelation seems very orderly, one wonders why Dr. Hahn should want to ignore it. As a result of ignoring it, he would certainly miss the chronological progression that is conveyed by this fourfold sequence of sevens.

Next he tells us of his frustration with the commentaries and with the standard approaches to the Book of Revelation: these were only able to illuminate selected details, but not the text as a whole. It was not until he started reading early Christian writings on the liturgy, and above all attending the Mass, that “the many parts of this book suddenly began to fall into place” (p.66). He was able to identify the basic liturgical elements of the Mass in the contents of the Apocalypse, where they appear as part of the ‘very stuff’ of the text. He then asks himself what the text would have meant to the faithful of St. John’s time and comes up with a most enlightening insight: “As Jewish Christians, we would immediately recognize the Temple in Revelation’s description of heaven” (p.68). This is followed by a list of so many of the features of the text that recall the Jerusalem Temple and its liturgy that one is left wondering why Dr. Hahn did not develop this correspondence any further (p.69). The next step would be to test whether the liturgy of the ancient Temple is not the key with which to unlock of the liturgy in the Book of Revelation. However, the author never pursues this insight, undoubtedly because he has already decided that the right key to interpret the text is the liturgy of the Catholic Mass. So, at a point of such great promise, the author changes the subject.

He now considers the date when the Book of Revelation was written, saying that “Almost all agree...that John’s measurement of the Temple (Rev 11:1) points to a pre-70 date, since after 70 there would have been no Temple to measure” (p.70). This is an extraordinarily careless statement, since it presupposes a literal interpretation of the command to measure the Temple, which is certainly not accepted by “almost all” as he asserts. The majority of interpreters actually view it as a metaphorical command that could easily have been written after the Temple’s destruction. Understood in this way, it refers to the metaphorical building of the new Temple—the Church—which the author goes on to speak about in the remainder of this chapter (p.70-71). It would have been more appropriate for his own interpretation if the author had stuck to the standard line.

In chapter two, the author begins the task of interpretation with the identification of the main characters in Revelation, noting that this depends largely on which of the four main schemes of interpretation is employed: futurist, preterist, idealist or historicist (p.72-3). It is hard to agree with the author when he then asserts: “There’s no reason why they can’t all be true simultaneously.” One wonders what he means by ‘true’. If the preterist view claims that an event described in Revelation has been completely fulfilled in the past and the futurists claim the same event will be fulfilled in the future, how can both views be true at the same time? At this stage, anyway, the author does not waste any time defending the simultaneous ‘truth’ of all four schemes, but instead declares his preference for the preterist perspective. By adding that Revelation’s pattern “of covenant, fall, judgment, and redemption” is not only true of one period of history, but “also describes *every* period of history, and *all* of history, as well as the course of life for each and every one of us” (p.73), he is indicating a strong affinity with the idealist approach. He will return to this in the next chapter, but in the meantime, he sets the stage with his interpretation of Revelation’s main characters.

The cast begins with St. John, the seer of the Revelation. It is refreshing to find the author adopting the traditional attribution of the Book of Revelation to the “beloved disciple” of St. John’s Gospel, noting among other things a fact that is rarely mentioned elsewhere, that “Both books reveal a rather precise knowledge of the Jerusalem Temple and its rituals” (p.74). Next Dr. Hahn considers the Lamb, whose identification with Jesus needs no explanation. What is not so clear, though, is why the Lamb of the Apocalypse “is a sacrificial lamb, like the Passover lamb” (p.76). The Passover lamb had no power to expiate sins, whereas the Lamb in Revelation expiates sins with his blood (Rev 1,5). The author does not seem to have noticed this rather significant inconsistency, let alone try to explain it.

On the identity of ‘a woman clothed with the sun’ (Rev 12,1), the author opens with a statement of such sweeping accuracy that we are convinced he is on the right track: “With many layers of meaning, it shows a past event prefiguring an event far off in the future. It recaps the Old Testament as it completes the New” (p.77). However, he then disappoints by dogmatically accepting the Marian interpretation of the woman. The woman is primarily Mary, because “this is the overwhelming teaching of the Fathers, Doctors, saints, and popes of the Church, both ancient and modern. It is the teaching of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (see no. 1138)” (p. 79). These are strong words indeed, pleasing to the dogmatically-minded, but not to those seeking a faithful exegesis of the text. Have the various authors or works invoked by Dr. Hahn ever claimed to give the definitive and authoritative interpretation of the Book of Revelation? And if we concede that the past event represented in this vision is Mary giving birth to Jesus, the real question, in accordance with the author’s genial observation above, concerns the nature of the event that this birth prefigures “far off in the future”. Are these Marian interpreters suggesting that Mary will appear giving birth to Jesus again in the distant future? If not, then this woman cannot primarily refer to Mary and it is no wonder that this view “is not held by many biblical scholars today”, as Dr. Hahn somewhat begrudgingly notes. Indeed, most modern scholars identify her primarily with Zion, the faithful community of God’s people, and only secondarily with Mary, insofar as she embodies this faithful community.

When we come to the two beasts we are told they are not just symbols, but neither, it seems, are they real human beings. Instead, they are supposed to be “real spiritual beings” (p.80), which is another way of saying they are demons (p.81): the first demonic beast “corrupts government authority” and the second “corrupts religious authority”. Nevertheless, of the first beast the text of Revelation states: “the number of his name is the number of a man...” (Rev 13,18), so we find ourselves in disagreement with the author over his spiritualization of these central characters. Confidence in the author’s interpretation is shaken again when he confuses (p.83) the beast that resembles a lamb (the second beast, Rev 13,11) with the beast that receives a mortal wound (the first beast, Rev 13,3). When it comes to identifying the mark of the beast, the famous 666, several different, but mostly unsatisfying, possibilities are given.

The author is on much firmer ground when discussing the angels, but runs into problems again with the identification of the 144,000. In one part of the text (Rev ch.7), he sees them as “the remnant who received God’s protection (His “sign”), fleeing to the mountains during Jerusalem’s destruction” (p.87) and presumably includes women and children. However, in another part of the text, he sees them as an army of celibate men (Rev 14,4). This is not the only place that he seems to have missed an important verbal-thematic cue. In his presentation of the vision of the ‘woman clothed with the sun’ (Rev 12,1), he argued that she must be Mary because this vision follows the sighting of the Ark of the Covenant in God’s Temple (Rev 11,19), and Mary is the Ark of the New Covenant (p.77-78). That may well be the case, but it is simply not relevant here, for the ‘opening of the Temple’ at Rev 11,19 has a doublet at 15,5, indicating that the text in between is an inclusion and should be interpreted apart. In fact, specific verbal-thematic cues (the time periods of 1260 days and 42 months) relate this inclusion to the start of chapter 11 (Rev 11,1-2) and indicate that these two passages should be interpreted in parallel. In other words, Rev 12,1–15,4 should be interpreted as preceding 11,19 and not as following it.

Chapter three deals with Revelation’s battles and its title “Apocalypse Then” betrays its conclusions. Although not completely excluding a futuristic interpretation of Revelation’s battles, the author insists that this should not be our primary focus (p.91), since “futurist scenarios arise and dissipate like smoke rings, as last year’s future fades into history” (p.91). Instead, we should examine the literal sense of the text, which is the foundation upon which

all the other senses are built. Then Dr. Hahn complains that the elucidation of the literal sense of the book of Revelation “is a most difficult enterprise, and it’s bound to be controversial” (p.91-92), since it is not clear whether it literally describes the past or the future or both.

Interpreting the Book of Revelation is further complicated, he asserts, because the literal and spiritual senses seem to merge in St. John’s vision. By this, he means that the text often gives its own literal interpretation. To the average reader, this is a reminder that the literal sense is important and should be pursued relentlessly. For Dr. Hahn, though, this means that John was living at a time of war and there was “no time to be overly subtle” (p.92). This is the basis for Dr. Hahn to assume that St. John must have been referring to the severe trials that Christians faced in his own day and, in particular, to the fall of Jerusalem. The literal sense of the text therefore relates to these first century events, according to Dr. Hahn. So although he admits that John uses the word ‘soon’ to refer to Jesus’ Second Coming, or *Parousia*, at the ‘end of *the* world’, it primarily and literally refers to the end of *a* world—the world of the Old Covenant with its Temple, its sacrifices and its rigid barriers between Jew and Gentile, heaven and earth. There followed a new beginning involving an ongoing *Parousia* of Jesus Christ in the Church and through her Sacrament of the Eucharist (p.93-94).

The author’s interpretive ‘scheme’ is now clear: in chapter two he showed his affinity for the idealist perspective by stating that the Book of Revelation “describes *every* period of history, and *all* of history, as well as the course of life for each and every one of us” (p. 73). In this chapter, he moves on to consider the Book’s literal sense, which is to say, the period of history that St. John was literally describing. Adopting a version of the preterist scheme, Dr. Hahn claims it refers to Judaea in St. John’s own time (p.92): the great city (Rev 11,8) is ancient Jerusalem (p.94-95) and the judgment and condemnation (Rev chs. 6,7-9) of the great city called Babylon (Rev 17-18) refers to the siege and destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies in 70 AD (p.95-97). The 144,000 (Rev ch. 7 and 14) are the Christians who, before the siege and destruction of Jerusalem, fled across the Jordan River to a place called Pella (p.97-98). Mt. Zion (Rev 14,1) is the area of the upper room where Jesus had eaten his last Passover and instituted the Eucharist. It was divinely preserved from destruction in the Jewish war of 66-70 AD and a church was built there, so it became the place where the new Jerusalem came to earth as Christians celebrated the supper of the Lamb (p.98-102).

According to this scheme, even the prophesied *Parousia* has taken place, and continues to take place in the Mass, in a way that does not exclude a future *Parousia*, understood in the traditional sense of the ‘Second Coming’ at the end of the world. In the meantime, the battle imagery of Revelation can be ‘spiritually’ applied to any historical conflict or tribulation. The author seems to be saying that it is a one-size-fits-all text, which fits first-century Judaea better than anything else.

It should be said that there is nothing particularly new or original about this hybrid preterist-idealist approach, even among modern commentators. One wonders, then, in what way the second part of the author’s original hypothesis can be sustained, that “the Mass is the only way a Christian can truly make sense of the Book of Revelation”. Far from using the Mass to make sense of this book as a whole, Dr. Hahn has simply applied a clever combination of the same old interpretive schemes used by contemporary biblical scholars. The only way the Mass has helped in his interpretation is by allowing him, through a conflation of the two senses of the Greek word *Parousia*, to assert that the entire Book of Revelation has been fulfilled in one sense (*Parousia* as Real Presence at the Mass in the present age), while remaining open to fulfillment in another sense (*Parousia* as Second Coming at the end of the world in the future). Basically, he has found a way to ‘harmonize’ the preterist, idealist and futurist schemes, and thereby justify some previous remarks to the effect that ‘the Apocalypse may apply quite concretely to both past and future events’ (p. 92, cf. p.72).

However, his argument rests on the assumption that the *Parousia* in the first sense (as Real Presence at the Mass in the present age) is theologically equivalent to the *Parousia* in the second sense (as Second Coming at the end of the world in the future). This allows him to say, such things as “When Christ comes at the end of time. He will not have one drop more glory than He has at this moment, when we consume all of Him! In the Eucharist we receive what we will be for all eternity, when we are taken up to heaven to join with the heavenly throng in the marriage supper of the Lamb. At the Holy Communion we are already there” (p.57); “The new Jerusalem came to earth then, as now, in the place where Christians celebrated the supper of the Lamb” (p.102); “The Apocalypse shows us that He is here in fullness—in kingship, in judgment, in warfare, in priestly sacrifice, in Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity—whenever Christians celebrate the Eucharist... When Jesus comes again He will not have a single drop more glory than he has right now upon the altars and tabernacles of our churches” (p.116); “In fact, in the sacrifice of the Mass, history achieves its goal, because there Christ and the Church celebrate their wedding feast and consummate their marriage” (p.137); “The new Jerusalem is Mount Zion; it is the Church of the Upper Room; and it touches down for us in the Holy Mass” (p.139). Here, then, lies the author’s true originality, in obliterating the difference between this age and the next, between the Mass and the World to Come, and in the process depriving us of a more concrete realization of the Holy City than what we have now in the celebration of the Mass. But, we must ask ourselves, is the difference between the ‘now’ and the ‘not yet’ of Christian expectation completely abolished in the Mass?

The answer to this question is no. There is a very definite qualitative difference between the Sacramental Presence of Christ in the present age and the Presence of the fullness of the Deity after the Second Coming at the end of the world. We saw how the Catechism expresses this difference by saying that the Mass is an ‘anticipation’ and a ‘pledge’ of the promised future fulfillment. In the 4th Eucharistic Prayer, the priest says “We recall Christ’s death, his descent among the dead, his resurrection, and his ascension to your right hand; **and looking forward to his coming in glory**, we offer you this body and blood, the acceptable sacrifice which salvation to the whole world”. There are similar words in the 3rd Eucharistic Prayer. Then again after the Lord’s Prayer, in the Mass, the priest says: “In your mercy keep us free from sin and protect us from all anxiety as we wait **in joyful hope for the coming of our saviour, Jesus Christ**”. These words of future expectation would be totally incongruent, and indeed superfluous, if Christ’s Real Presence at the Mass (*Parousia* – first sense) were theologically the same as his return at the end of the age (*Parousia* – second sense).

If we try to define the difference between the Sacramental Presence of Christ in the present age, and the Presence of the Deity after the Second Coming at the end of the world, the Book of Revelation would actually be a good place to start. It speaks of this difference when it describes the New Jerusalem, the city portrayed as the wife of the Lamb, the Queen of the King of kings. The text affirms that, after the Second Coming, God “will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death; neither sorrow, nor crying, nor pain will there be any more, because the former things have passed away” (Rev 21,4). The Mass has been celebrated for nearly 2000 years, but can anyone seriously claim that “the former things have passed away”? Do we already give thanks for the removal of death, sorrow, crying and pain? And if the New Jerusalem really “touches down for us in the Holy Mass” (p.139), would we not expect these sad realities to disappear from among us? In the next section, part three, the author returns to this issue, in a further attempt to convince us that the Mass is the fulfillment of all our hopes and expectations, insisting that what is a ‘pledge’ and an ‘anticipation’ of those hopes is actually their realization.

Chapter four is a defence of Revelation’s depiction of the severity of God’s Judgment, which to some seems “too grotesque and scandalous, and even irreconcilable with the idea of

a merciful God” (p.104). The defence is a familiar one: God is the loving Father and his judgments are an expression of fatherly love and discipline. “They impose suffering that is remedial, restorative, and redemptive. God’s wrath is an expression of His love for His wayward children” (p.105). Moving to the Book of Revelation (p.106-107), the author then explains that St. John’s vision is also a courtroom scene in which ancient Jerusalem is on trial in front of the judge, who is God, assisted by angels and elders, and in front of sworn witnesses for the prosecution (Rev 10,5-6; 11,3-13; 6,9-10). The plagues delivered by a series of liturgical bowls (Rev 15-17) represent divine judgment on those who reject God’s Covenant, who are the unbelieving first-century Jews presumably (though not stated), whilst bringing life to the faithful. How can a merciful God be so severe? The answer given is that the only way a loving God can help those who have fallen into serious and habitual sin, allowing the world and its pleasures to rule them like a god, is to destroy the foundations of their world (p.110-111). There is no attempt here to explain either the universal extent of the destruction caused by the bowl plagues or the eternal duration of the punishment awaiting those who are condemned, including all those whose names have been erased from the Book of Life (Rev 13,8; 14,9-11; 17,8; 19,20; 20,10; 21,8.27). In fact, the author has vastly underestimated the severity and extent of the divine judgments described in the Book of Revelation and so his defence is totally inadequate to the task.

The Third Part

The third part of the book takes the author’s interpretations of the Book of Revelation and applies them to the Christian life and especially to Mass attendance. In chapter one, Dr. Hahn revisits the idea of Mass as *Parousia*. He reminds us of the double meaning of *Parousia* and develops it one step further. He now asserts that the primary meaning of this word is no longer the Second Coming at the end of time, as defined by dictionaries and common usage, but “a real, personal, living, lasting, and active presence” of Jesus—“His coming that takes place *right now*” (p.116). The Book of Revelation, he claims, powerfully expresses this “*Parousia Now*” idea, which he spells out in liturgical terms, ending with “God dwells among mankind, *right now*, because the Mass is heaven on earth” (p.116). He admits that this is the main idea behind his book “*The Lamb’s Supper*”, and insists that it is as old as the Church, quoting four passages from the Catechism to show that it is still current teaching: “That’s not just me saying so, or a handful of dead theologians. The Catechism says so” (p.117). But once again, the Catechism is much more restrained than our author, using that word ‘foretaste’ this time, just like it previously used of the words ‘pledge’ and ‘anticipation’. It says that in the earthly liturgy “we share a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy” (CCC 1090), singing the songs of the heavenly liturgy “while being in the midst of trial” (CCC 2642). If the Church is still undergoing trials and tribulations, we question how our author can in all honesty claim that “God dwells among mankind, *right now*, because the Mass is heaven on earth” (p.116). As we said earlier, he cannot be referring to the final visions of the Book of Revelation (Rev 21-22), because in that state of perfection there will be no more sorrow, mourning, pain or death when God dwells among mankind (Rev 21,4) and no amount of deception can convince us that these ‘former things’ have already passed away.

So in what sense can the author claim that “God dwells among mankind, *right now*, because the Mass is heaven on earth?” Is he just speaking hyperbolically or metaphorically of the Mass, or perhaps using the words ‘heaven on earth’ in a poetic way? In brief, one wonders whether the author is not simply playing with words, as he does so well in the subtitles of his book. One feels like saying to him, yes, the Greek word *Parousia* has two meanings, but in English and Latin the ‘Real Presence’ and the ‘Second Coming’ refer to two incomparably

different modes of Christ's coming and no amount of spin or trickery can abolish the difference.

In his book, the author anticipates these objections by inviting us to see "the glory hidden in the mundane in next Sunday's Mass". His answer, then, is to read the Book of Revelation "with a sacramental imagination" (p.118), and learn to see it as the Church sees it. He then lists the many liturgical elements in the text that evoke aspects of the Mass and concludes "Taken together, these elements comprise much of the Apocalypse—and most of the Mass" (p.120). Furthermore, he observes that these liturgical actions underlie so many other parts of the text that one can see the Mass is not just in the detail but also in the grand scheme. However, the author fails to convince when he then tries to match (p.121) the first half of the text with the first part of the Mass (The Liturgy of the Word) and the second half of the text with the second part of the Mass (The Liturgy of the Eucharist). He has succeeded in showing us that the narrative backbone of the Book of Revelation is liturgical in character, but he has failed to convince us that it relates specifically to the Mass.

Nevertheless, the author then asks why the celestial worship scenes in Revelation should have been described in terms of earthly worship (p, 121-123). He suggests that the worship depicted in Revelation is a kind of model that guides worship on earth, at the same time concluding, but also including, the Old Covenant. Although he does not actually use the word 'fulfil', this is clearly what he means, i.e. that the liturgy in Revelation fulfils the ceremonial requirements of the Old Covenant, including the need for a central Sanctuary on Mount Zion in Jerusalem. Quoting Hebrews 12:21-24, he now identifies the worship scenes of Revelation with Mt. Zion and calls it the heavenly Jerusalem. Had he continued on this track, he might have come to see that the liturgical elements that he associates with the Mass are actually much closer to the liturgical elements that were performed in the second Temple. But again he stops short and takes us back to the Mass, describing it on page after page with the language of the final consummation taken from the Book of Revelation (p.125-129).

In chapter two, there is an attempt to redefine the Lamb's wrath and vengeance, which are so vividly described in the Book of Revelation. The idea that the Second Coming may provoke and involve violence contradicts the author's central thesis that the *Parousia* of the Second Coming is identical to the *Parousia* of the Real Presence. Here he goes one step further to suggest that Jesus' Second Coming may turn out to be much like his first (p.134). After all, he writes, lambs cannot be wrathful and Christ is called a Lamb, so the "wrath of the Lamb" (Rev 6,16) must mean something else. Similarly, the conquering messianic imagery in Rev 19 must be free of anger and vengeance because "Jesus is still a Lamb—till the very end" (p.135). So the author recommends an adjustment of the popular conception of the Second Coming, to avoid raising false expectations for a sudden and probably catastrophic divine intervention at the end of history. The new understanding does not "do away with divine wrath, it simply fits into the consistent picture of God that Jesus provides" (p.135), viewing God's judgment in terms of divine fatherhood, which the author insists does not lower the standard of justice or its severity. But again, as we have already pointed out, the Book of Revelation speaks about angels and people being condemned to eternal punishment (Rev 13,8; 14,9-11; 17,8; 19,20; 20,10; 21,8.27). Unless the author has some way of explaining away this tragic fate, this terrifying expression of God's anger and vengeance, he is gravely mistaken in comparing the Second Coming with the First Coming or with the Eucharist. For in the very next sentence, he does just that: "What, then, should be our image of Jesus' Second Coming? For me, it is Eucharistic, and it is brought about as the Mass brings heaven to earth" (p.135). This is fully realized eschatology in its most unscriptural form!

In the same chapter we get a glimpse of how the author thinks the future will pan out without the divine and dramatic intervention that brings history to an end, and is called the Second Coming: "If history has, in a sense, already reached its goal, why should we continue

to fight? Because not all the world has come to the feast, even if you and I have. So we must continue to ransom the time, to restore all things to Christ” (p.138). Reading between the lines, one senses that Dr. Hahn sees history as a gradual conversion process, in which everyone will eventually become Catholics, go to Mass and then heaven will be fully on earth, thus fulfilling God’s plan of salvation in a gradual way. It should be noted, though, that this view does not even conform to the Church’s understanding of the Second Coming and last things: “The kingdom will be fulfilled, then, not by a historic triumph of the Church through a progressive ascendancy, but only by God’s victory over the final unleashing of evil, which will cause his Bride to come down from heaven. God’s triumph over the revolt of evil will take the form of Last Judgment after the final cosmic upheaval of this passing world” (CCC 677).

The final part of the chapter is an exhortation to attend Mass and receive the Sacraments, since this provides the faithful with ‘the weapons of the spirit’ needed for every type of combat. There is little to challenge in these few pages, for the author’s attitude to the Mass is rather more influenced by real pastoral needs than by his ideological drive to depict the Mass as the fulfillment of the Book of Revelation and of all history. In fact, the view of the Mass presented here is quite consistent with the definition that my accusing priest deemed heretical.

The penultimate chapter speaks about the way faithful participation in the Mass leads to a renewal of the covenant-family bond with the divine Trinity. Once again, we find ourselves agreeing with the Sacramental theology espoused, but objecting vigorously to the comparison of this family bond as a marriage, and the Mass as ‘the marriage supper of the Lamb’. Quite apart from the fact that there is absolutely no indication, in the wording of the Mass itself, that we are renewing our marriage vows (p.149), or that this divine marriage is being ‘consummated’ every week (p.137, 146), the normal metaphor for the relation between the Church and Christ in this age is ‘betrothal’. Marriage is in view and the Church is the fiancée who is preparing herself, but it is still too premature to call her the wife of the Lamb and to presume intimate relations. It is even more mistaken to ascribe this view to the Book of Revelation, as Dr. Hahn proceeds to do: “The Apocalypse unveiled the Eucharist as a wedding feast, where the eternal Son of God enters into the most intimate union with His spouse, the Church” (p.149). Nowhere does the Apocalypse describe the Eucharist as a wedding feast; it first mentions the wedding feast in relation to Christ’s Second Coming at the end of history (Rev 19,6-9). And if the author is here hinting at the spiritual equivalent to sexual relations, then one wonders whether he sees Mass as an opportunity for spiritual ecstasy *en masse*. Heaven forbid, but just a small ‘development’ of this doctrine in less ‘spiritual’ communities could take us right back to the orgiastic rites of the ancient pagans.

In the same chapter, the author’s rebuke against those who say the Mass is a “repeat performance” is justified, but deserves further comment (p.150). He goes on to say “There is only one sacrifice; it is perpetual and eternal, and so it needs never to be repeated. Yet the Mass is our participation in that one sacrifice and in the eternal life of the Trinity in heaven, where the Lamb stands eternally “as if slain”” (p.150). This is the third time in his book where the author comes tantalizingly close to seeing the parallel between the Book of Revelation and the liturgy of the second Temple, in this case to the daily *Tamid* sacrifice, whose name actually means ‘perpetual and eternal’.

The final chapter of the book reads as a compelling and heartfelt eulogy on the ancient Christian rite of Holy Communion. In brief, there is nothing better in the entire world for the human body and soul, so long it is received in good faith: “To receive Communion, then, is to receive heaven—or to bring the most severe punishment upon oneself” (p.160). The second part of this statement brings us to the crux of my lengthy examination of this book. It summarizes the inherent dangers of criticizing, or even discussing, the author’s writing and

goes a long way to explain the deep conviction with which his views are now held. Dr. Hahn has so thoroughly blended his interpretation of the Book of Revelation with his admiration for the Mass, that to criticize the first may lead you unwarily to disparage and undervalue the second.

So I return to this chapter with some trepidation, in case I should say something that could be interpreted as a criticism of, or lack of admiration for, the inexhaustible and inexpressible richness of the Mass. I will simply say that I agree with everything written about the Mass in this chapter, except with those expressions that describe it as the eschatological consummation of God's plan for mankind. So, for example, I object to the following statements: "for the Mass is the marriage supper of the Lamb" (p.155) and "the door opens *now* on the marriage supper of the Lamb" (p.163).

As noted before, the Mass will continue to be celebrated 'until Christ returns' (1Cor 11,26), at which time his marriage feast will begin (cf. Rev 19,6-9). The celebration of Mass and the marriage feast are not therefore concurrent. And since Christ's Second Coming has not yet occurred, we can be sure his marriage feast has not yet begun and the martyrs under the altar in heaven are still crying out "How much longer..." (Rev 6,9-11). St. John's vision of the consummation, comprising especially chapters 21-22 in the Book of Revelation, has not yet been fulfilled and it is an act of unprincipled deception to attempt to persuade the faithful that it has.

Conclusion

Here is an opportunity, then, to summarize this review of "*The Lamb's Supper*" and speak directly to the author. Firstly, Dr. Hahn, thank you for drawing our attention to the liturgical aspects of the Book of Revelation. In turn this has made us more aware of the heavenly liturgy that takes place all around us, especially when we participate in the Mass. However, you have overlooked the temporal progression of the heavenly liturgy described in the Book of Revelation and, due to a spurious intuition you received at your first Mass, you have assumed that the heavenly liturgy has already arrived at its conclusion—the celebration of the marriage of the Lamb with his bride, the Church—even though you know very well that the Church is still not fully prepared for this event. As the Catechism says: "The Church...will receive her perfection only in the glory of heaven', at the time of Christ's glorious return" (CCC 769, also Rev 19,6-9).

However, the linkage of the marriage feast with the Second Coming has not deterred you. You have simply brought Christ's Second Coming forward by equating it with his Real Presence at the Mass. You then argue that every Mass is a celebration of the marriage feast, precisely because every Mass is a Second Coming or 'return' of Christ ('*Parousia Now*'). You actually go further. You compare the Mass to the 'consummation' of the marriage—to the intimate, quasi ecstatic, union between Christ and his people. By referring to the Mass in this way, you have gone far beyond the teaching of the Church in the Catechism, which refers to it modestly as an 'anticipation', 'foretaste' or 'pledge' of the future consummation. You have 'glorified' the Mass in a way that was never formally taught or intended.

You have achieved this 'glorification' of the Mass by claiming it is the fulfillment of all the hopes and expectations that, in truth, await their realization at Christ's Second Coming. To this end, you have accommodated the Book of Revelation to your scheme of realized eschatology ('*Parousia Now*'), thus minimizing the transformation of creation at the Second Coming and depriving the book's final visions of a concrete realization in the future. In the process, you have downplayed the universality and severity of the final judgment, failing to consider the unspeakable tragedy of eternal condemnation. At the cost of these essential

elements of Christian eschatology, you have portrayed the Catholic Mass as the goal of history and the ultimate fulfillment of Christian prophecy and expectation. One wonders what has inspired you to falsely exaggerate the eschatological dimension of the Mass in this way, at the cost of diminishing the true eschatological significance of the Book of Revelation.

Well, I can think of three possibilities. Firstly, you were writing at the end of the second millennium, at a time when Protestant millenarians were announcing end-historical scenarios, the likes of which you had previously spurned. You wanted to combat these scenarios by redefining the eschatological prophecies on which they were based.

Your reaction against Protestant millenarianism was part of a broader reaction against Protestant antipathy for the Catholic Church and Mass. Your '*Parousia Now*' theology of the Mass responds to these negative Protestant views in a way that resembles the Catholic responses to Berengarius of Tours in the 11th century, when he attempted to belittle the doctrine of the Real Presence. It is, in other words, the product of an over-reaction to the negative opinions of the Protestants. Perhaps you also wanted to show your new Catholic family how much you appreciate the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist (cf. p. xi).

The final possibility is that your original intuition was influenced by Catholic "triumphalism", for want of a better word. This is the attitude that exalts the Roman Catholic Church as an institution, holding her to be the 'new Jerusalem' on earth and the sole repository of salvation in the world.

But why, you may wonder, am I so concerned about what you have written in your little book, so many years ago? Let me explain: I believe, and hope to have shown, that the realized eschatology expressed in this interpretation is not only erroneous, but is also harmful for the Faith. It is erroneous because it ignores the temporal progression of the heavenly liturgy described in the Book of Revelation and misreads the New Testament's most complete vision of the eschatological transformation of life on this planet (Rev 21-22). It is harmful because it raises false expectations of the Mass and, at the same time, undermines the final visions of Revelation, weakening faith in God's promises, dimming hope in their future fulfillment and blunting respect for the Scripture in which these things are revealed.

Nevertheless, "*The Lamb's Supper*" has been widely diffused and has become very influential among the clergy of the Catholic Church. So much so, that your little book is now regarded by some as a standard of orthodoxy in Eucharistic piety and in the interpretation of the Book of Revelation. According to this standard, I am accused of being a 'heretic' by one of your 'school'. For me this is an ominous sign. I believe it is time to speak out against your teaching before this 'school' becomes a sect of proud and emboldened elites, armed with a special set of Eucharistic beliefs, and branding everybody else as a heretic.

John Ben-Daniel,
Jerusalem, Israel
Lent 2011