

THE THEOLOGY OF THE EUCHARIST: WORSHIP THAT MAKES US WHOLE

1. Eucharist, Agape, Holy Sacrifice, Mass, Divine Liturgy: What's in a Name? (October 26)

Names we give to the Eucharist shape the way we welcome God's healing, presence, and fellowship.

2. The Words of Institution (Consecration): Are They Magical? (November 2)

Jesus' words "This is my body" make sense if we become aware of the many ways Jesus is present in our celebrations.

3. The Invocation of the Holy Spirit (Epiclesis): The Eucharist's Forgotten Act? (November 9)

The Holy Spirit is called to sanctify bread, wine, and the community.

4. The Great Thanksgiving (Doxology): What Does the Eucharist Have to Do with Praise? (November 16)

The Eucharistic turns everything into praise and thanksgiving to the Father.

5. **"Do This in Memory of Me" (Memorial): Are We Remembering or Re-Living?** (November 30)

The Eucharist is more than remembrance - it unites us to Jesus' death and resurrection, until he comes again.

6. The Eucharist as Meal and Sacrifice: How Do These Fit Together? (December 7)

We become a sacrifice to God by being united in one body through the sharing of one bread.

7. One Bread, One Body (Communion): How United Do We Really Become? (December 14)

The Eucharist heals us from division and isolation by calling us into fellowship with each other and with God.

8. "Go in Peace to Love and Serve the Lord" (Mission): How Does the Eucharist Shape Our Lives? (December 21)

The Eucharist blends into everyday life as God sends us out to love, serve, and be his witnesses to the world.

**2. “DO THIS IN MEMORY OF ME” (MEMORIAL):
ARE WE REMEMBERING OR RE-LIVING?**

- 9. Last time we saw how the Eucharist is fundamentally
 - 9.1. *Thanksgiving* to the Father
 - 9.2. This is the meaning of the very word *eu-charist* which means “giving grace for grace”.
 - 9.3. The whole movement of the celebration is directed towards the Father.
- 10. There is however another dimension of the Eucharist which points towards Jesus
 - 10.1. It is the way in which we fulfil Jesus’ request: *Do this in remembrance of me.*
 - 10.2. It is the act of remembering, ‘re-memor-ing’ Jesus himself – as it is attested in the most ancient description of the Eucharist in the New Testament which is found in Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians 11:23–26

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that
the Lord Jesus on the night when he was handed over

took bread,

and when he had given thanks,

he broke it, and said,

“This is my body, which is for you.

Do this in remembrance of me.”

In the same way also

he took the cup, after supper, saying,

“This cup is the new covenant in my blood.

Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

For

as often as you eat this bread and

drink the cup,

you **proclaim the Lord’s death**

until he comes.

- 11. Let us see more in detail what is the “this” that we are asked to “do”
 - 11.1. The **bread** is *Jesus’ body for us*
 - 11.2. The **cup (wine)** is *Jesus’ blood* and also *covenant*, that is “new way of being united with God”
 - 11.3. Eating this bread and drinking this cup are a way of *remembering Jesus*.
- 12. Significantly though Paul adds an explanation to what “remembering” means in the sentence that follows

‘For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you **proclaim** the Lord’s death until he comes.’
- 13. It is an act of *remembering* that also is a *proclamation*. Our understanding of the Eucharist hinges on how we understand these words.
- 14. Let us compare a weak and a strong definition of ‘remembering’:

- 14.1. Remembering as “calling something or someone to mind that is absent” (weak sense)
 - i. internal, mental activity
 - ii. you retrieve a memory image
 - iii. the thing remembered stays in the past
 - iv. nothing changes in the present
 - v. the event or person is not made present
 - vi. For example remembering a deceased loved one: you think about them, feel emotions, recall events, but the remembering does not bring the person into the present.
- 14.2. Remembering as “re-presenting a past reality so that it becomes operative in the present” (strong sense)
 - i. an *act* that “makes present” a past event
 - ii. the remembered reality becomes real now, it is happening now
 - iii. it has *performative force*: it “does” something, it brings about a new situation.¹
 - iv. This is the Hebrew way of understanding the act and rituals of remembrance called *zikaron*
 - v. For example the Jewish *Passover*: the Jewish people do not merely *think about* the Exodus. They celebrate it so that in every generation, each person can regard themselves as having come out of Egypt.
 - vi. I become part of the event and the reality I am remembering.
15. Christian tradition has understood *remembering* and *proclaiming* in the strong sense:
 - 15.1. Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 350 AD)

“After the invocation the bread becomes the body of Christ and the wine the blood of Christ. By partaking of them we proclaim the death of Christ, for His death and resurrection are made present before us.”²
 - 15.2. Thomas Aquinas (13th c.)

“This sacrament is a memorial of our Lord’s Passion, which he commanded us to celebrate. In this celebration we proclaim the death of the Lord, for the celebration is the re-presentation [Latin: ‘*repraesentatio*’] of that Passion in which Christ was immolated.”³
16. In both these passages, what is ‘made present’ or ‘re-presented’ is, according to Paul’s sentence, the Christ’s death, or his death and resurrection, or his Passion.
 - 16.1. This has generated a secular debate about whether at the Eucharist we are taken back in time to the Golgotha at the moment when Jesus died on the cross, or whether Jesus’ sacrifice was made present in our time – or even, in more extreme forms, whether Jesus was sacrificed *again* (although this last interpretation is almost unanimously rejected by theologians).

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¹ A *performative declaration* is a spoken act that creates a new reality by being uttered, especially when paired with symbolic action. In a wedding, saying “I do” and exchanging rings makes the couple married. In swearing into office, reciting the oath enacts the person’s new public authority.

² *Mystagogical Catecheses* 5.8–10

³ *Summa Theologiae* III, q.83 a.1

- 16.2. The best way of avoiding this rabbit hole is focusing on Jesus own words and on the meaning of Jesus' death.
 - 16.3. Jesus asks his disciples to "do this in remembrance of *him*" – that is the whole of what Jesus stands for, of what is at the heart of his identity and mission.
 - 16.4. And this is further explained when he says "this is my body which is *for you*", which refers to Jesus giving himself out of *love* for us.
 - 16.5. And in the sentence "This cup is the new covenant in my blood": 'blood' in Scripture means "life given out of love", and 'covenant' is the union, communion, fellowship God wants with between him and us, and between ourselves.
17. All this become clearer as we discover why Paul has reminded the Corinthians of the last supper. The Corinthians were turning the Lord's Supper into a divided, chaotic meal. Wealthier members arrived early, ate their own food, and left poorer believers hungry and humiliated. In this context, Paul warns that anyone who eats and drinks in such an selfish manner is contradicting the very *memory of Jesus* that the meal is supposed to proclaim.
- 27Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. 28Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29For anyone who eats and drinks **without discerning the body** eats and drinks judgment on himself. [...] 33So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, **wait for one another**— 34if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that when you come together it will not be for judgment.
18. "In Paul's rendering of the tradition, two closely linked themes stand out:
- i. the sharing of the Supper calls the community to think of Jesus' death for others,
 - ii. and that death is understood to initiate a new covenant (v. 25; cf. Jer. 31:31–34).
- 18.2. To be in covenant relation with God is to belong to a covenant people bound together by responsibilities to God and to one another; the character of this new covenant should be shown forth in the sharing of the meal.
 - 18.3. The trouble with the Corinthians is that they are celebrating the Supper in a way that disregards this structure of covenant obligations and demonstrates an odd amnesia about Jesus' death.
 - 18.4. By showing contempt for those who have nothing, they are acting as though his death had not decisively changed the conditions of their relationship to one another."⁴
19. "The proclamation of the Lord's death occurs not just in preaching that accompanies the meal; rather, **the community's sharing in the broken bread and the outpoured wine is itself an act of proclamation, an enacted parable that figures forth the death of Jesus "for us" and the community's common participation in the benefits of that death.**

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⁴ Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, 305-306).

- 19.1. That is why Paul says that what the Corinthians are doing in their common meals is not the Lord's Supper (v. 20). The problem is not that they are failing to say the right words but that their enactment of the word is deficient:
- 19.2. their self-serving actions obscure the meaning of the Supper so thoroughly that it no longer points to Christ's death."⁵
20. "The more affluent Corinthians are consuming their own food and shaming the poorer members (vv. 20–22).
- 20.1. In this context, to eat the meal unworthily means to eat it in a way that provokes divisions (v. 18), with contemptuous disregard for the needs of others in the community.
- 20.2. Paul's call to **self-scrutiny** (v. 28: "discerning the body") must therefore be understood
- i. not as an invitation for the Corinthians to probe the inner recesses of their consciences
 - ii. but as a straightforward call to consider how their actions at the supper are affecting brothers and sisters in the church, the body of Christ. [...]
 - iii. "Discerning the body" cannot mean "perceiving the real presence of Christ in the sacramental bread"; this would be a complete non sequitur in the argument.
 - iv. For Paul, "discerning the body" means recognizing the community of believers for what it really is: the one body of Christ. [...]
 - v. Those who are failing to "discern the body" are those who act selfishly, focusing on their own spirituality and exercising their own social privileges while remaining heedless of those who share with them in the new covenant inaugurated by the Lord's death."⁶
21. Paul adds
- 33So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, **wait for one another**— 34if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that when you come together it will not be for judgment. (1 Corinthians 11:33f)
22. "There are two different possible readings, turning on the ambiguity of the verb *ekdechesthai* ("to wait for" or "to receive").
- 22.1. According to the interpretation found in most English translations and in most commentaries, Paul tells the Corinthians **to wait for** (*ekdechesthe*) one another when they assemble to eat. Those who are too impatient or too hungry to wait—presumably the wealthier Corinthians—are told to eat at home before the meeting (cf. v. 22a: "Do you not have homes to eat and drink in?") so that they will not shame the poor by gorging themselves on their private store of rich food in front of the whole assembly, perhaps before the poor have arrived. [...]
- 22.2. On the other hand, [...] the problem lies not so much in the timing of the eating as in the unequal distribution of food. A second possibility, therefore, should be given consideration: Paul is telling the Corinthians not just to wait for one another but to receive one another as guests (cf. Rom. 15:7) when they come together. [...]

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⁵ Hayes, 306.

⁶ Hayes, 307.

- 22.3.** On this reading, Paul is calling the more affluent Corinthians not merely to preserve a public appearance of unity in the celebration of the Supper but actually to break down the barriers of social status and to receive the poorer members as guests in their homes, sharing their food with those who have none.”⁷
- 23.** This should help us to gain a deeper understanding of what Jesus means when he asks: *Do this in remembrance of me.*
- 24.** It is a remembrance, a re-presentation, a memorial of his *death* insofar as it is a manifestation of his love for us:
- “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13)
- “Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering” (Ephesians 5:1–2)
- “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” (Ephesians 5:25)
- “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us” (1 John 3:16)
- 25.** The ‘this’ that is made present, re-presented, performed, realized is our union in one body, one covenant, one fellowship:
- 25.1.** What we have to ‘do’ in remembrance of him is being the ‘body of Christ’, the body united by Christ’s love.
- 25.2.** “Discerning the body” means recognizing that by eating the same bread, drinking the same cup, we become united with one another, responsible for one another.
- 26.** This is why the Gospel of John chose to relate the last supper without mentioning Jesus’ words, but displaying their meaning:
- 1Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.
- 2During supper, [...] he rose, laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. 5Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.
- 12When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them,
- “Do you understand what I have done to you? 13You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. 14If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. 15For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.” (John 13:1-20)
- 27.** “Do this in remembrance of me” means “you also should do just as I have done to you”.
- 27.1.** The ‘grace’ we have received is this love
- 27.2.** The way of “giving grace for grace” (Eucharist) is giving the same love.
- 27.3.** The only way of “giving thanks” (Thanksgiving) that really is agreeable to the Father is us “loving one another as Jesus loved us”. (cf. John 3:34f)

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⁷ Hayes, 310f.