

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.

7. ONE BREAD, ONE BODY (COMMUNION): HOW UNITED DO WE REALLY BECOME?

9. Does Communion
 - 9.1. **declare** unity
 - 9.2. **police** unity
 - 9.3. **create** unity?
1. We saw in a previous talk the passage from the 1 Corinthians where Paul talks about the celebration of the Eucharist.
 - 1.1. 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.
 - 1.2. In this context, Paul warned 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.

[27](#)Whoever, 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.** [28](#)Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. [29](#)For anyone who eats and drinks **without discerning the body** eats and drinks judgment on himself. [...] [33](#)So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, **wait for one another—** [34](#)if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that when you come together it will not be for judgment.
 - 1.3. To eat the meal unworthily means to eat it in a way that provokes divisions because this disregards the needs of others in the community.
 - 1.4. Paul's call to "discerning the body" (28)
 - i. is a call to consider how their actions at the supper are affecting brothers and sisters in the church, which is the real body of Christ.
 - ii. "Discerning the body" means recognizing the community as the one body of Christ.
 - iii. 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 Jesus' passion and resurrection.
2. Paul adds

[33](#)So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, **wait for one another—** [34](#)if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that when you come together it will not be for judgment. (1 Corinthians 11:33f)

 - 2.1. Paul is asking the Corinthians not just to wait for one another but **to receive one another** as guests (cf. Rom. 15:7) when they come together.
 - 2.2. 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.
1. Now the sentence by Paul "For anyone who eats and drinks **without discerning the body** eats and drinks judgment on himself" (v. 29) progressively led some churches to

develop elaborate practices of “ex-communication”, that is “exclusion from the communion”

- 1.1. Not only a refusal to allow people to receive the consecrated bread, that is to receive ‘communion’ (“common-union”)
- 1.2. But also the exclusion of people from the life of the community.
2. Many churches still practice this form of excommunication. For example, see Rick Warren, the founder of Saddleback in California declares
 “Saddleback practices church discipline - something rarely heard of today. If you do not fulfill the membership covenant, you are dropped from our membership. We remove hundreds of names from our roll every year.”¹
3. The RC church and the Orthodox church exclude from communion those who do not share their same beliefs.
 - 3.1. The principle is that people can be united in Eucharistic communion only if they agree on doctrine and ethics.
 - 3.2. Also that people should be reconciled with God and with each other to receive communion – the idea being that if someone is not united with God and with others in real life then sharing the same consecrated bread is a lie, and even a blasphemy.
 - 3.3. Hence the practice of “ex-communication”
 - i. Cf. the recent well-known case of a priest refusing communion to Joe Biden because of his support for abortion rights.
 - ii. Divorced remarried couples are refused communion in the RC church even if they attend church every Sunday.
4. These practices of excommunication are usually based of the following arguments:
 - 4.1. If people are not really committed to the life and practice of the community they should be sanctioned (cf. the exclusion from the parish roll in Saddleback)
 - 4.2. If people do not obey to church teaching especially in matter of ethics (abortion, divorce) they are in fact ‘ex-communicating” themselves – and the exclusion from communion simply makes this manifest, public.
 - 4.3. Withholding the Eucharist is meant to protect the sacrament and call the persons to repentance.
5. These practices frame communion as a boundary marker. The admission to communion is reserved only to those who are truly “inside”. It prompts questions on whether the Eucharist
 - 5.1. is medicine for the weak or a reward for those who are right (in belief and practice);
 - 5.2. a sign of achieved unity or a means toward deeper unity;
 - 5.3. a sacrament that heals division or one that enforces it;
6. There is also the question of asymmetry of enforcement: why abortion and divorce and not (to give some example)
 - 6.1. Capital punishment
 - 6.2. Immigration policy

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¹ Rick Warren, *A Purpose Driven Church*, 54.

- 6.3. Economic injustice
- 6.4. Racism or environmental harm.
- 7. The risk is that Communion is being used to enforce a narrow and ultimately arbitrary moral boundary rather than embody a comprehensive pursuit of the common good.
- 8. Cf. the teaching of Pope Francis

The Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak. These convictions have pastoral consequences that we are called to consider with prudence and boldness. Frequently, we act as arbiters of grace rather than its facilitators. But the Church is not a tollhouse; it is the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems.²
- 9. It is true that Paul points out a wrong way of taking part in the Eucharist, and of receiving communion:^x

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.

 - 9.1. This however is not a mandate for church leaders to become the arbiters of whether a person receives communion “in an unworthy manner” or “without discerning the body”.
 - 9.2. It is rather an invitation to personal self-examination and, to a certain extent, to encourage each other in embodying sacramental communion in real care for each other and for the common good.
- 10. Behind this debate, there is the perennial questions
 - 10.1. of whether church unity is matter of enforcement or of conversion, growth, and persuasion
 - 10.2. and of whether the church should be a community of people who can see themselves as ‘righteous’ with the concurrent danger of hypocrisy (cf. Pelagianism).
- 11. Hence the importance of the order between *sacramental* and *ethical* unity
 - 11.1. Jesus did not dictate a creed and establish that only those who subscribed to it are part of his community
 - 11.2. But he asked people to gather together and share in his body and his blood, not just once but over time, so that this *sacramental* union progressively ushers in moral and ethical communion – it is a *process*, it takes time.
- 12. What does it mean for us then
 - 12.1. To receives communion “in an worthy manner”
 - 12.2. And to “discern the body”?
- 13. Individually, are we just ‘consumers’ in our participation to the Eucharist without connection to the community?

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² *Evangelii Gaudium*, 47

14. As a community, are we willing to engage for the good of others, of society?
15. “By this,” Jesus says, “everyone will know that you are my disciples—by the love you have for one another.” (John 13:35)