

# Learning to See and to Waddle with our Tongues: a view from the Table<sup>1</sup>

## I. Introduction

At the first gathering for worship of the new Southern Presbytery, Richard Dawson, who was presiding, began the Liturgy of the Eucharist with these words: 'We come now to share together in *the central celebration of Christian worship*'.<sup>2</sup> It struck me that if this really is the case, if what William Willimon calls 'Sunday Dinner'<sup>3</sup> really is *the* central celebration of Christian worship, then it is only proper that this mysterious drama provide form and critique to everything that we do and think as Church, and I wondered what it might look like if we took Richard seriously, at least this once.

In this lecture, I want to explore what might be gained by viewing both the Church and the world not from the more commonly-viewed perspectives of the spoken or fontal word, but rather when viewed with tongues wrapped around broken sour dough and generous helpings of pinot noir poured out accompanied with the words, 'The blood of Christ, shed for you ...'.

Of course, my assumption (as a Reformed theologian) is that it will look no different in essence than it does from the perspective of the font or pulpit. This is because these particular proclamation activities are not self-referential but rather direct us to Jesus, God's Word made flesh.<sup>4</sup> If fonts, pulpits and tables have become places where the Church has come to expect to encounter Christ and Christ to encounter us, then this is only because of a free and continual act on the part of the One who delights in being found and who discloses most fully in that particular death to which the Church's sacraments direct us.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This lecture was delivered at the Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership, Dunedin, on 7 February 2011.

<sup>2</sup> 'Order of Service for Southern Presbytery AGM Service, Friday, 3<sup>rd</sup> December, 2010', at Mornington Presbyterian Church, Dunedin.

<sup>3</sup> William H. Willimon, *Sunday Dinner: The Lord's Supper and the Christian Life* (Nashville: Upper Room, 1981).

<sup>4</sup> To proclaim the Gospel is for the Church to be, in Gutiérrez's words, 'a sacrament of history, to fulfil its role as a sign-community, a sign of the convocation of all by God'. Gustavo Gutiérrez, 'Liberating Evangelization: Church of the Poor' in *Gustavo Gutiérrez: Essential Writings* (ed. James B. Nickoloff; Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 251; cf. William Stringfellow, *A Private and Public Faith* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 78; Jürgen Moltmann, *The Open Church: Invitation to a Messianic Life-style* (London: SCM Press, 1985), 73; George Hunsinger, *The Eucharist and Ecumenism: Let Us Keep the Feast* (Current Issues in Theology; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 151, 184–5; Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1976), 82.

<sup>5</sup> In a sense, the Church sponsors no such thing as 'sacraments' in and of themselves. There are only sacraments *of the good news*, i.e., signs or proclamation activities which direct us – like John the Baptist and the Scriptures themselves – to see and proclaim the truth about Jesus who is *the* Sacrament of God. To refer to the Church's sacraments as 'signs' is to say something about the way that sacraments *work*, that they work through what they *say*, and what they say is communicated in language apposite to us. In other words, the sacraments work as signs *because we can read them*. It is because we know what it looks and feels like to wash away dirt from our bodies, for example, that the Church can describe baptism in terms of washing away sins (so Acts 22.16; Eph 5.26; Tit 3.5). It is a sign that looks somewhat alike. Beating someone over the head with a hammer, on the other hand, could never become a sacramental sign of forgiveness because that would contradict its normal meaning. It would point in the wrong direction. This point is well made in Timothy Radcliffe, *Why Go to Church?: The Drama of the Eucharist* (London/New York: Continuum, 2008), 189.

In this lecture, I propose that ecclesial existence is not only about learning to breathe underwater, and learning to read Scripture in community, but that it is also about learning to see and to waddle with our tongues.<sup>6</sup>

## II. The integrity of the liturgy

It has become almost commonplace to note that we are living in an age when the Church is pathetically afflicted by worldly distinctions and beset by historic schisms and inherited divisions. The body of Christ is a broken body. At the same time, many parts of the body acknowledge the presence and sincerity of other parts. This has not always been so. And while this situation is a cause for thanksgiving, we must not, as William Stringfellow reminds us, minimise

either the profundity or the pathology of the estrangement to which all who are baptized are heir ... In truth, all of us meet in shame and scandal – and we will continue to do so until that day when every baptized person is welcomed to any altar in the church of Christ, until, in the end, every person is baptized.<sup>7</sup>

The ecumenical hope is that in the midst of this world's fragmentation, conflict and alienation, God's people may live as the one reconciled community in which the world might see and foresee the reconciliation all of things in Christ. And nowhere is this vision more edifying and more self-evident, more public and more transformative, more radical and more cogent, more personal and more of service to the world, than in the Church's worship where the community gathers to theatricalise,<sup>8</sup> recite and rehearse God's action in this world and to anticipate God's coming kingdom.

But the Church's liturgy is not only about recalling and rehearsing; it is also a contemporary event in which the Church expects to hear the living Lord speak again in its midst, shattering the carrels of time and space and location. That is why both the confessions and the intercessions of the congregation within the context of the liturgy are so indispensable to the integrity of the liturgy itself. *This* is the time and *this* is the place and *this* is the way in which the whole manifold, existential involvement of the members of Christ's body in the everyday life of the world is offered and consecrated for the discretion of Christ himself. Moreover, in the public liturgy of the Gospel, in the *event* in which the Church is reconstituted, the worshipping community becomes for the world a mirror, as it were, of the eschaton. That is why the passing of the peace and the collection of money in the meeting, for example, are among the most political acts of hope that the Church enacts.<sup>9</sup>

The Church is most clearly manifested, however, when it gathers at the Lord's Table. Here it takes up a commitment to be like what it eats, to prefigure 'the Reign of God and a sign of hope set amidst the injustices and oppressions of the world God loves so much'.<sup>10</sup> In other words, in order to learn that our identity as God's people is not a private matter but implicates our entire lives and the lives

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<sup>6</sup> To be sure, water and eating, two of the principle *loci* at the heart of Christian community are, no less than the sermon, proclamation activities. They are, in the words of P.T. Forsyth, 'the acted Word' through which God proclaims anew the good news. P.T. Forsyth, *The Church and the Sacraments* (London: Independent Press, 1947), 176. As my title indicates, I want to maintain that the journey of discipleship is one that is deeply formative; hence the grammar of 'learning'. But I do not mean to suggest that learning is concerned merely with cognition. The Reformed tradition, particularly since the Enlightenment, has made this mistake too often.

<sup>7</sup> William Stringfellow, 'Liturgy as Political Event', *The Christian Century* (22 December 1965), 1573.

<sup>8</sup> See William Stringfellow, *Dissenter in a Great Society: A Christian View of America in Crisis* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 151.

<sup>9</sup> See Radcliffe, *Why Go to Church?* 161–74. On the collection of money, see Stringfellow, 'Liturgy as Political Event', 1575.

<sup>10</sup> Duncan B. Forrester, *Theological Fragments: Explorations in Unsystematic Theology* (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 120.

of others we must take seriously our identity as the Body of Christ constituted in a particular practice of remembering and celebrating and hoping.<sup>11</sup>

### III. Supping: seeing and waddling with full stomachs

It ought to be becoming clear by now that, on this point at least, I agree with Richard Dawson: the Supper is ‘the central celebration of Christian worship’. Here, I am in good company. In the second century, for example, Irenæus spoke of the Supper as that which simply makes being a Christian possible,<sup>12</sup> and in the nineteenth century, P.T. Forsyth described the Supper as ‘the real centre of the Church’s common and social life’.<sup>13</sup> Put differently, the Supper is, as Herbert McCabe puts it, ‘about the way that we are with each other’.<sup>14</sup>

This is good news, for the Supper is, above all else, concerned with witness. In this lecture, I wish to draw attention to eight things to which the Supper bears witness. And even though Cicero suggested that eight is the so-called ‘perfect number’,<sup>15</sup> I offer these not as in any sense a conclusive list, but simply in the hope that we may look again, and that we may keep talking about what we see when we sup together in the name and presence of the Lord. The first thing that I think the Supper invites us to think about again and to live differently as a result of such seeing is ...

#### 1. God

The Supper speaks – first and foremost – of God. It speaks about what God has done, about what God is doing, and about what God will do. God is the subject of its proclamation, the host who invites and serves, and the locus of the participants’ hope. Apart from God, the Table is simply a silent and dust-collecting antique that ought to be cast aside to make room for the band or data projector. But if it is true that the Table seems to be the kind of place that God likes hanging around – the specific locale of God’s availability<sup>16</sup> to us where, by Christ’s promise, bread and wine and the community gathered around them become the place where creatures can locate God and can respond to God’s word, can see and touch and taste and, in Graham Greene’s words, put God into their mouths<sup>17</sup> – then perhaps those who claim to come together in God’s name to worship God may need to think again about the physical space that the Table occupies among us.

And because the Supper is bound up with an unambiguous particularity of God’s life among us, namely Jesus of Nazareth, it says something to us about God’s attitude to creation, to history, to suffering, to death, to human flourishing. Moreover, it orientates those whose being is shaped by its

<sup>11</sup> ‘To do so is also’, as William Cavanaugh reminds us, ‘to resist a superficial application of the liturgy to “social justice” concerns. The eucharist is not a mere symbol, a source of meaning which the individual reads and then applies to social issues “out there” in the “real world”. There is nothing more real than the Body of Christ. The eucharist is not to be applied to political issues; rather the eucharist makes the church itself a political body. The church practices the politics of Jesus when it becomes an alternative way of life that offers healing for the wounds that divide us’. William T. Cavanaugh, ‘The Body of Christ: The Eucharist and Politics’, *Word & World* 22, no. 2 (2002), 177.

<sup>12</sup> Irenæus, ‘Against Heresies’ in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1: The Apostolic Father, Justin Martyr, Irenæus* (ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson; Edinburgh/Grand Rapids: T&T Clark/Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1993), 528.

<sup>13</sup> Forsyth, *Sacraments* 260; cf. Bernd Wannewetsch, *Political Worship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 147; Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Volume 2: The Works of God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 227.

<sup>14</sup> Herbert McCabe, *Human words become God’s Word* [2001 (cited 13 December 2010)]; Online: [http://torch.op.org/preaching\\_sermon\\_item.php?sermon=506](http://torch.op.org/preaching_sermon_item.php?sermon=506).

<sup>15</sup> See Graham Flegg, *Numbers: Their History and Meaning* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 273–4. Cicero, in the *Somnium Scipionis* (*De re publica*, VI, 12) taught that both seven and eight are perfect numbers (‘plenus numerus’). See Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 503.

<sup>16</sup> See Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1: The Triune God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 205; Jenson, *ST* 213–5, 219–20; James K.A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-Secular Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 222–3.

<sup>17</sup> Graham Greene, *The Power and the Glory* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), 60, 195.

action among them toward God's saving history in Jesus Christ, creating in them again and again lives marked by eucharist (i.e., thanksgiving) and 'a preparedness to be interrupted again and again by the one whose self-giving saves us from self-destruction'.<sup>18</sup> It reminds us that true existence is neither self-possessing nor self-grounded but rather is God-orientated and so other-person-centred.<sup>19</sup>

## 2. People

The Supper also speaks about human beings: that we, too, are the object of grace's claim upon us, that the God who meets us in Jesus Christ, the God who is the object of the Church's worship and the subject of the Church's song, is utterly and completely *for us*.<sup>20</sup> This truth is most starkly placed before us in the fact that the Table's host is Jesus, the thoroughly-human God, upon whose flesh and blood we feast and to whom we belong.

And because the fellowship of the Supper is a public and not a private event, it also recalls that to belong to Christ is to belong to Christ's body, it is to belong to those other than ourselves. So we eat not only with friends, but with strangers, with enemies and with betrayers. This raises all sorts of questions about the appropriateness, or otherwise, of home groups, for example, celebrating the Supper together. More importantly, it recalls that this community – unlike a club or a special interest group – is not held together by a common commitment, not even by our common commitment to Christ, for 'we do not create our communion'. Rather, 'we receive one another with Christ and Christ with one another; we at once receive Christ and the church in which we receive him. That is, at Eucharist, we are', as Robert Jenson puts it, "'coembodiments" of Christ'.<sup>21</sup>

This recalls for us that the Supper is also about ...

## 3. Story

We *homo sapiens* are, essentially, both a storied people and a story-telling people. So, a basic human question is not primarily, 'What am I, as an individual, to do or decide?' but rather, 'Of what stories do I find myself a part, and thus who should I be?', for we literally *live* by stories. The Church, too, understands itself as a pilgrim people, as a people *storied* on the way, as a people whose very way becomes the material which shapes the narrative that has long preceded it. It understands that being human never begins with a white piece of paper. As Alasdair MacIntyre rightly reminds us, we never start anywhere. Rather, we simply find ourselves within a story that has been going on long before our arrival and will continue long after our departure.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, Christian community begins with being found in the very act of God's self-disclosure, an act which 'cuts against the grain of myths of progress and chronological snobbery'<sup>23</sup> and places us in the grain of the universe. And what – or, more properly, who – is disclosed in that crisis of discovery is one who provides memory, unity, identity and meaning to the story of our life. As Eberhard Jüngel puts it, 'We are not ... simply agents; we are not just the *authors* of our biography. We are also those who are acted upon; we are also a text written by the hand of another'.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>18</sup> D. Bruce Hamill, 'Beyond Ecclesiocentricity: Navigating between the Abstract and the Domesticated in Contemporary Ecclesiology' (Conference paper presented at STAAZ Conference, Dunedin, 11 November, 2010), 11.

<sup>19</sup> See Angel F. Méndez Montoya, *The Theology of Food: Eating and the Eucharist* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 148.

<sup>20</sup> See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone Is Credible* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 102; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (ed. John T. McNeill; trans. Ford Lewis Battles; The Library of Christian Classics; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977), IV.xvii.2.

<sup>21</sup> Jenson, *ST2* 222.

<sup>22</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984). See also Howard J. Loewen, 'Rethinking Christian Ethics: From Moral Decisions to Character Formation', *Direction* 18, no. 1 (1989), 55–66.

<sup>23</sup> James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 191.

<sup>24</sup> Cited in John C. McDowell, *Hope in Barth's Eschatology: Interrogations and Transformations Beyond Tragedy* (Ashgate New Critical Thinking in Theology and Biblical Studies; Farnham: Ashgate, 2000), 197; cf. Ernst Käsemann, *On Being a*

So it is not just any story by which the Church lives<sup>25</sup> but rather a particular story given to it – namely, Israel’s story in which, in the words of R.S. Thomas, it ‘gasp[ingly] ... partake[s] of a shifting identity never [its] own’.<sup>26</sup> And mature communities of faith are those for whom this story is embodied deeply and celebrated regularly at the Lord’s Table, where God names *who* we are and *where* we are and *why* we are, where we name the death which is in us and around us, and where we join with the Spirit to give thanks for being called from emptiness into fuller meaning. As Stephen Sprinkle puts it, ‘the eucharist offers a liturgical narrative by which all of ordinary life can be reframed, shaped, and ordered again and again ... gradually, the shape of the supper gets into the core of [our] life’.<sup>27</sup> Here, communities of faith are called to rejoice in the knowledge that the gathering by God ‘from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south’ (Ps 107) to drink from the same cup and to share of the same loaf literally is the story. It is the story that recounts that the intersections of our lives take place not merely in the shadow of the cross but, more deeply, in the very wounds of the crucified God and in the divine narrative to which those wounds bear witness. Those who inhabit such intersections, i.e., those who wash one another in the waters of baptism and who set the communion table with courage and joy and hope, are those who live in the power of the resurrection and are open to the movements of the story-making Spirit. They are those for whom the story is itself life, a life defined as it is by baptism – which is the eschatological sign of starting out – and the regular fellowship at the Lord’s Table – which is the eschatological sign of being a people on the way.<sup>28</sup>

The Supper, of course, highlights a particular chapter in the story, a chapter upon which the whole story depends: namely, the chapter which tells of humanity’s long journey from the far country to the hospitality of the Triune life. It is a journey made possible only because of God’s gracious decision to become human in the far country and there, in the sublimity of love’s endurance, embrace all that death has made us. In the *kenosis* of God’s cross, in the hell into which God descends, God embraces the full experience of God-abandonment and the abyss of our malediction and sin is traversed to its extreme limits. And then, in a display of utter eucatastrophe, history takes an unexpected turn in the sepulchre of Christ, and ‘every instant of its time passes into the form of Christ’s unique and unrepeatable death’ and the unarmed power of ‘the Eucharist in which he, everywhere on earth and in all ages, is perpetually given’<sup>29</sup> is revealed as the truth by which all realities find their birth or their end. This is the story that the Supper recounts and invites us to see ourselves in. And so, as the Book of Common Order has it, ‘We come not to this supper as righteous in ourselves, but *we come to seek our life in Christ*, acknowledging that we lie in the midst of death’.<sup>30</sup>

As a pilgrim people, the Christian community is formed literally ‘on the way’, and that by One who ‘feeds the Church with Word and Sacraments, and [the community] has the gift of the Spirit in order that it may not lose the way’.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, the Church is called to be sustained by a diet of absolutely no

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*Disciple of the Crucified Nazarene* (ed. Rudolf Landau and Wolfgang Kraus; trans. Roy A. Harrisville; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2010), xiii.

<sup>25</sup> See 2 Tim 4.3–4.

<sup>26</sup> R.S. Thomas, ‘Reflections’ in *Collected Later Poems, 1988–2000* (Highgreen: Bloodaxe, 2004), 235.

<sup>27</sup> Stephen V. Sprinkle, *Ordination: Celebrating the Gift of Ministry* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004), 129, 130.

<sup>28</sup> See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: a Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (trans. Margaret Kohl; London: SCM, 1977), 243.

<sup>29</sup> Angelo Scola, *Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Theological Style* (trans. John Tedeschi Bishop; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995), 109.

<sup>30</sup> The Church Service Society, *A Book of Common Order: Being Forms of Prayer, and Administration of the Sacraments, and Other Ordinances of the Church* (Edinburgh/London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1896), 289; cf. Michael Welker, *What Happens in Holy Communion?* (trans. John F. Hoffmeyer; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 107–8.

<sup>31</sup> Uniting Church in Australia, *The Basis of Union* (Melbourne: Uniting Church Press, 1992), §3. This wonderful founding document of the Uniting Church in Australia, *The Basis of Union*, articulates that the Church is ever ‘a pilgrim people,

variety, feeding only upon what R.S. Thomas calls 'live bread for the starved folk'.<sup>32</sup> And when we eat together in Eucharist on Sundays, we do so in the hope that we will have our eyes opened to and participate in what God is up to in the world, not only on Sundays but on Wednesdays too.<sup>33</sup> For if we get good enough at forgiving those who gather around the Lord's Table, we hope that we might also get good at forgiving those who gather with us around the breakfast table, and around other tables, too, where the business of life is discussed. In other words, 'our everyday experience of life in the congregation is training in the arts of forgiveness; it is everyday, practical confirmation of the truthfulness of the Christian vision'.<sup>34</sup>

'Failing at such truthfulness, we acquiesce to the sentimentality of a culture which assumes that we have nothing more to offer empty people than to make their lives a little less miserable'.<sup>35</sup> As Stanley Hauerwas put it in his wonderful memoir, *Hannah's Child*, 'Through worship, the world learns the truth that is required for our being truthful about ourselves and one another'.<sup>36</sup> Isn't that one of the reasons that we place ourselves in communities of faith? To learn to love people that we don't really like that much – people who irritate us, people who we find odd and who we'd never be seen dead with otherwise, people who frustrate us and hurt us and disappoint us. To embrace, and to be embraced by, the reality of the Supper is, as Miroslav Volf reminds us, to trust that we already are, in a sense, reconciled and that 'we will one day be seated together at the eternal table of friendship, with Christ as our host'.<sup>37</sup> It is an invitation to live as if the one who first appeared as a stranger at the Emmaus breakfast was serious when he preached the so-called Sermon on the Mount. It is an

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always on the way towards a promised goal'. This confession recalls that the act which constitutes the Church is itself an act of self-dispossession, an act of putting to death or of laying aside all temptation to 'power' and 'mastery' and to be completely abandoned to the continuous and reckless practice of divesting all that it has with joyful and liberal humility: 'To those who have, more will be given, and from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away' (Matt 13.12; 25.29; Mk 4.24–25; Lk 8.18; 19.26). In this sense the Church is called to be the most paradoxical of institutions, completely lost in the world, and concerned not with its stability and permanence, but with its homelessness and dispossession, completely abandoned in faith, hope and love. See Douglas John Hall, *Bound and Free: A Theologian's Journey* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 82.

<sup>32</sup> R.S. Thomas, 'Bread' in *Collected Poems, 1945–1990* (London: Dent, 1993), 93.

<sup>33</sup> Here I wish to defend the claim, made by Hauerwas and others, that living in a deeper awareness of the story of Jesus and of the Church does, in the freedom and grace of God, 'do' something. While there is no magical change of status, and while these graces do not turn us into liturgical automatons nor automatically make us more ethically-consistent or mature, the Church's gospel-shaped practices are, I suggest, the means by which the Head (i.e., Jesus) immerses the Body (i.e., the Church) in the way of ordinary gospel-posture. Specifically, they are means by which Christ *trains* us. This is true whether we are talking about something like the Church's calendar, its fasting, or its weekly praying of the Lord's Prayer, and it is especially true when it comes to the Lord's Supper. Every time we come to the Lord's Table, which is where the entire Church story is enacted in concentrated form, we are offered training in how to live sacramentally in the world, to unearth its idolatries and to expose what Stringfellow calls the 'transience of death's power in the world'. William Stringfellow, *Free in Obedience* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 44.

<sup>34</sup> Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 91; cf. Stringfellow, *Dissenter in a Great Society* 159; Anthony Dancer, ed., *William Stringfellow in Anglo-American Perspective* (Aldershot/Burlington: Ashgate, 2005), 158–9; Bill Wylie Kellermann, ed., *A Keeper of the Word: Selected Writings of William Stringfellow* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994), 125; Michael Jenkins, *Invitation to Theology: A Guide to Study, Conversation, and Practice* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001), 226–7; Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom* 202–3; John Paul II, *Dominicae Cenae of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II to all the Bishops of the Church on the Mystery and Worship of the Eucharist* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1980), §6.

<sup>35</sup> Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens* 143.

<sup>36</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *Hannah's Child: A Theologian's Memoir* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2010), 159.

<sup>37</sup> Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2006), 124; cf. Miroslav Volf, 'The Final Reconciliation: Reflections on a Social Dimension of the Eschatological Transition', *Modern Theology* 16, no. 1 (2000), 94. Certainly, the Supper brings under negative judgement the image of the Church as a closed circle or a holy huddle or a maintainer of cultural and nationalist boundaries and champions the notion of Church as a circle open to the world in friendship. Lest it proclaim what R.S. Thomas referred to as 'a dry chalice' (R.S. Thomas, 'God's Story' in *Collected Poems, 1945–1990* (London: Dent, 1993), 268), i.e., a contradictory word than that spoken in Christ, surely the Supper is about eating with people different from us. See Peter J. Leithart, *Against Christianity* (Moscow: Canon, 2003), 93; Richard John Neuhaus, *Freedom for Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1992), 2, 9; Moltmann, *Church in the Power of the Spirit* 258.

invitation to foretaste humanity's full rescue from anonymity and a vision of the ultimate meaning of every human person and story.<sup>38</sup>

#### 4. Hospitality

We have highlighted the way in which the Supper directs us to, and invites us into, a particular story. That story includes the world, and so the Supper is to be shared not only with family members (i.e., those who worship the Triune God made known in Jesus Christ) but also with strangers and even enemies. For the Supper, like the Church itself, is an event of the Spirit made porous to the world: 'the bread that I will give', Jesus said, is 'for the life of the world' (John 6.51).<sup>39</sup>

Certainly the Supper calls upon us to locate our thinking about, and our prayers for, the Church within God's broader soteriological and missiological and public horizon and so to reject the ecclesiocentricity so often associated with our sacramental existence. It symbolises the openness of divine hospitality to any who will come and, in Gustavo Gutiérrez's words, 'enter into the circuit of love that unites the persons of the Trinity'.<sup>40</sup> Few have pressed this point more powerfully than Jürgen Moltmann:

The church owes its life to the Lord and its fellowship to his supper, not the other way round. Its invitation goes out to all whom he is sent to invite. If a church were to limit the openness of his invitation of its own accord, it would be turning the Lord's supper into the church's supper and putting its own fellowship at the centre, not fellowship with him ... The Lord's supper takes place on the basis of an invitation which is as open as the outstretched arms of Christ on the cross. Because he died for the reconciliation of 'the world', the world is invited to reconciliation in the supper. It is not the openness of this invitation, it is the restrictive measures of the churches which have to be justified before the face of the crucified Jesus.<sup>41</sup>

The evangelical character of the Supper recalls God's invitation to every Judas to take the 'long journey backward'<sup>42</sup> into the arms of divine irresponsibility. The Supper reminds the Church that it is not elected to be humanity's bad cook, pushing at human beings 'the lumpy mashed potatoes of morality or the thin gruel of spiritual uplift'.<sup>43</sup> Rather, the Church is caught up in Love's own conspiracy, in 'sneaking to the world the delectability of grace', the solid cheesecake Good News

<sup>38</sup> See Jenson, *ST2* 216. Perhaps it is no coincidence that St Paul comes back repeatedly to the Supper as he deals with the Corinthians and their train-wreck of a church. It seems that we either feast on Christ, or we feast on each other! In this context, it is interesting to note that while he supported communion in only one species (bread), Nicholas de Cusa linked Eucharistic practice with the health of the Church. Pelikan summarises de Cusa position thus: 'When the love of the church was at its peak, believers communicated often and under both species; when it was only warm, they received more rarely and by means of intinction; and now that it was merely tepid, they received even less often and under one species. Thus, "the usage was commensurate with the love of the church"'. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, Volume 4: Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300–1700)* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 124.

<sup>39</sup> See Reinhard Hütter, *Bound to be Free: Evangelical Catholic Engagements in Ecclesiology, Ethics, and Ecumenism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004), 69.

<sup>40</sup> Gutiérrez, 'Liberating Evangelization', 245. See also Letty M. Russell, *Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of the Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 17.

<sup>41</sup> Moltmann, *Church in the Power of the Spirit* 244–5, 246. One might recall Luther's words from a sermon entitled 'Confession and the Lord's Supper': 'But if you feel that you are unfit, weak and lacking in faith, where will you obtain strength but here [in the Lord's Supper]? Do you mean to wait until you have grown pure and strong, then indeed you will never come and you will never obtain benefit from the holy communion'. Martin Luther, *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther* (ed. John Nicholas Lenker; vol. 1; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2000), 207; cf. Robert Farrar Capon, *The Parables of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988), 140–1; Welker, *What Happens in Holy Communion?* 73.

<sup>42</sup> Edwin Muir, 'The Transfiguration' in *Collected Poems* (ed. Edwin Muir; London: Faber and Faber, 1960), 198–200.

<sup>43</sup> Robert Farrar Capon, *Kingdom, Grace, Judgment: Paradox, Outrage, and Vindication in the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002), 488.

that God, in the end, has a sweet tooth.<sup>44</sup> To eat at the Lord's Table, therefore, is to be summoned to eat the food of missionaries.<sup>45</sup>

It is also to find ourselves in communion with all those creatures – human and otherwise – who suffer and are exploited at greed's hands. To sup is to feel a physical hunger in the world that the gospel repudiates. The Supper, therefore, plays a conscientising,<sup>46</sup> subversive and politicising function as it calls upon God's people to really love their neighbour. It stands as a rebuke and corrective of our trivialisation of the Gospel, recalling that the banquet of the Lord is a justice meal eaten in the midst of injustice. It is a sharing meal, shared in the midst of accumulation and hoarding. It is communal conviviality, embraced in the midst of private pain and brokenness – and it is mocked when we refuse to embody the justice it proclaims.<sup>47</sup>

My final point under this heading of hospitality is the most important: namely, that it is none other than Christ who gathers God's beloved together around the Table. The only reason that Baptism and the Supper are signs of the Church's hope is because they are signs of the one who 'leads the world into the liberty of the divine life'.<sup>48</sup> Jesus, and not the ordained minister, is the host. It is, after all, his Table, and his font, and his pulpit, and his congregation, and the Church, after all, has only one priest. How miserable therefore, is the truth that so much schism and denominational conflict in the body of Christ has come via debates on who can and who cannot preside at the *Lord's Supper*. While the Church has every responsibility to set apart those whom it believes God has called for 'a decent ordering of the Lord's Table', those set apart serve as stewards of mysteries not of their authorship, but aware always that 'the authority in the Eucharist lies not in the order of the person appointed ... but in Christ's priesthood alone'.<sup>49</sup> We might do better in bringing this truth home to others if those charged by the church to serve as eucharistic superintendents themselves ate and drank *before* serving the rest of the congregation.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 488.

<sup>45</sup> There are implications here for the way the Church organises itself, whether at a local or national or catholic level. So Gutiérrez, 'Liberating Evangelization', 247: 'As a sacramental community, the church should signify in its own internal structure the salvation whose fulfillment it announces. Its organization ought to serve this task. As a sign of the liberation of the human being and of history, the church itself in its concrete existence ought to be a place of liberation. A sign should be clear and understandable. If we conceive of the church as a sacrament of the salvation of the world, then it has all the more obligation to manifest in its visible structures the message that it bears'.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>47</sup> The Supper recalls for us God's perfect attention to our most basic needs – our daily bread in fact. But eucharistic practice also presents us with a great challenge. Érico João Hammes reminds us that 'sharing at Jesus' table means extending it for more people, making space for others to eat, finding fulfillment in setting the table for those who are hungry. The table extended in this way becomes a feast, a banquet at which humankind and divine mystery mingle in mutual fellowship'. Érico João Hammes, 'Stones into Bread: Why Not? Eucharist-Koinonia-Diaconate', *Concilium* 2 (2005), 32; cf. John Dominic Crossan, *God and Empire: Jesus against Rome, Then and Now* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 170.

<sup>48</sup> Moltmann, *Church in the Power of the Spirit* 243; cf. Reinhard Hüter, *Bound to be Free: Evangelical Catholic Engagements in Ecclesiology, Ethics, and Ecumenism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004), 69.

<sup>49</sup> Andrew Purves, *Reconstructing Pastoral Theology: A Christological Foundation* (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 101.

<sup>50</sup> This point serves to underscore the reality that what we are confronted with in the Supper is not a 'what' at all but a 'who'; namely, the total self-giving Christ, risen and ascended and fully present with us. So 'when we come to Holy Communion we rediscover not just a story about Jesus that happened a long time ago, we rediscover the unchanging reality of what some theological traditions call "the covenant of grace" as renewed in the Eucharist'. Rowan Williams, "'The Fellowship of the Baptized" – The John Coventry Memorial Address' (Conference paper presented at Meeting of Inter-Church Families, Church of the Immaculate Conception, Farm St, London, 20 March, 2010). Indeed, what is going on in our meeting with the risen Jesus at the Table is the renewal of baptismal identity, praying in Jesus' prayer, being caught up into Jesus' self-offering to the Father and bringing with us the world we belong to. 'In Holy Communion the whole action of the Eucharist, the new humanity appears as something which sanctifies and gives meaning to the world in Jesus' name, which establishes and re-establishes again and again communion, communication. We take the bread and the wine of creation. We, so to speak, leave them where Jesus can get at them and we find that they have become signs of communication, reconciliation between God and the world and between human beings and each other'.



The fifth thing that the Supper invites us to reconsider is ...

### 5. Power

The word 'power' births different reactions in different people. For some, it evokes hope, for others suspicion, and for others, temptation.<sup>51</sup> Our own *Book of Order*<sup>52</sup> uses the word 'love' once, 'Holy Spirit' and 'law' 7 times, 'Holy Communion' 12 times, 'Jesus' 13 times, 'God' 38 times, and the word 'power' 55 times. (For the record, the word 'grace' does not appear at all.) Whatever one may wish to conclude from these numbers, one can at least observe here something of the Church's anxiety about power and control. Of course, we are not here talking about what Shakespeare's Macbeth called 'barefaced power',<sup>53</sup> but it is power no less real that the Church fears being abused. For as Charles Taylor reminds us, 'Power can allow itself illusions'.<sup>54</sup>

Now 'one of the greatest problems of history is', as Martin Luther King Jr. once noted, 'that the concepts of love and power have usually been contrasted as opposites – polar opposites – so that love is identified with a resignation of power, and power with the denial of love ... What is needed', he says, 'is a realization that power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love'.<sup>55</sup>

At this point, Christian theologians will want to raise a finger, like John the Baptist, towards one in whom such love and power are not only possible but also take a particular shape which undermines

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Rowan Williams, 'The Church: God's Pilot Project' (Conference paper presented at Clergy Synod, Chelmsford, 5 April, 2006). Attempts to locate Jesus in the different elements of the feast misses the point entirely for in the freedom of the Host's love, he has promised to be there and to make himself known.

<sup>51</sup> See Briony Martin, *Coming to Terms with Power* (Grove Spirituality Series; Cambridge: Grove Books, 1999), 3–6; Maori Marsden, 'God, Man and Universe: A Maori View' in *Te Ao Hurihuri: The World Moves On: Aspects of Maoritanga* (ed. Michael King; Auckland: Hicks Smith/Methuen, 1977), 119.

<sup>52</sup> The Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, *The Book of Order, Adopted and Prescribed by the General Assembly on the Day of 29 September 2006, Amended October 2008* (Wellington: The Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2008).

<sup>53</sup> William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* (ed. W.G. Clark and W.A. Wright; Clarendon Press Series: Shakespeare Select Plays; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1869), 33. Act III, Scene I, Line 118.

<sup>54</sup> Charles Taylor, 'Understanding and Ethnocentricity' in *Philosophical Papers: Volume 2, Philosophy and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 130. Foucault asserts that power is most powerful when functioning invisibly. Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (trans. Alan Sheridan; New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 201–3. The Bible, of course, is full of stories about power. The NRSV speaks of 'power', 'powerful', 'powerfully' and 'powers' 435 times (compared with say the word 'powerless' which is used only 13 times). And the Church has, by and large adopted this language, whether in speaking of the miraculous vindications of the Church's mission, or of the Church's political clout, or of 'power over' some particular group.

<sup>55</sup> Martin Luther King, *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990), 247. With these words, King calls upon us to reject those understandings of love championed by 'the Nietzsches of the world' (King, *Testament of Hope* 242) who would see love as cowardly, sentimental and weak emotionalism, and to instead see in love the true reality that undergirds all things and which, when all has come and gone, abides. Drawing on the work of Paul Tillich (who was the subject of King's doctoral dissertation) King contended that the 'universe is under the control of a loving purpose and that in the struggle for righteousness [humanity] has cosmic companionship'. King, *Testament of Hope* 40; cf. Paul Tillich, *Love, Justice, and Power: Ontological Analyses and Ethical Applications* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), 25–7. Certainly, some have argued for the impossibility of the existence of any genuine relationship between power and love; that even if in theory they might find creative reconciliation, in practice such is impossible. Carl Jung, for example, argued that 'Where love reigns, there is no will to power; and where the will to power is paramount, love is lacking'. Carl Gustav Jung, *Two Essays in Analytical Psychology* (trans. R.F.C. Hull; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 53. And Jung's student, Robert Johnson, put it thus: 'Probably the most troublesome pair of opposites that we can try to reconcile is love and power. Our modern world is torn to shreds by this dichotomy, and one finds many more failures than successes in the attempt to reconcile them'. Robert Johnson, *Owning Your Own Shadow: Understanding the Dark Side of the Psyche* (New York: HarperOne, 1993), 89; cf. Adam Kahane, *Power and Love: A Theory and Practice of Social Change* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2010).

the sin-soaked forms which constitute all too often what we name as 'normal'. Here the disengagement between liturgy and ethics bespeaks the paucity of the Church's imagination, and it is precisely a recovery or birthing of eucharistic and baptismal imagination that the Church so desperately requires today, not least as it engages in enacted conversations around ecclesial identity in an increasingly post-Constantinian West, in enacted conversations around gender and sexuality in pastoral leadership, in enacted conversations around the fact that 925 million people who share life with us on this planet are malnourished, in enacted conversations around the fact that around a quarter of the world's human population are living in what the World Bank has called 'absolute poverty', and in enacted conversations which are as beset with alarm and power-politics as they are with witness and faithful hermeneutics. The Supper gives Christians new ways to imagine – and to enact – power.<sup>56</sup> And this is critical because Christian worship loses its integrity when it becomes either isolated from the realities of life, or an escape from the implications of oppression. As Duncan Forrester reminds us, 'It is impossible to keep company with Christ if we refuse to accept the company he has chosen to keep. Following the patristic principle *ubi Christus ibi ecclesia* (where Christ is, there is the Church), it is necessary to go to find Christ and therefore the Church among the poor he loves, to listen to them, and to learn afresh from them how to worship God in Spirit and in truth ... Worship separated from the great issues of liberty and justice has become idolatry, an instrument of ideological manipulation, a way of hiding from God rather than encountering [God]'.<sup>57</sup>

Jesus' Table certainly bids us to conceive of power in exclusively non-abusive ways, for here we are speaking of the power to forgive sinners, of the power for which St Paul prays that we may 'comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge' (Eph 3.18–19). It is the power of vulnerability in loving community, and of community in loving vulnerability. It is the power that R.S. Thomas has in mind when he writes:

When we are weak, we are  
strong. When our eyes close  
on the world, then somewhere  
within us the bush

burns. When we are poor  
and aware of the inadequacy  
of our table, it is to that  
uninvited the guest comes.<sup>58</sup>

It is the power of transparent and humble commitments.<sup>59</sup> It is the power of freedom exposed in weakness. It is the power that rejoices in patterns of authority that echo the life-giving manner of one who reinstated that other 'Judas' – Peter – with the words 'Feed my lambs' (John 21.15). It is, in short, the power of the Triune Life.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>56</sup> See William Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Blackwell, 1998), 11; Luther, *Complete Sermons* 1 210–11.

<sup>57</sup> Forrester, *Theological Fragments* 109, 110; cf. José Comblin, 'Reflections on the Notification Sent to Jon Sobrino' in *Getting the Poor Down From the Cross: Christology of Liberation* (ed. José María Vigil; np: International Theological Commission of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, 2007), 75; Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens* 170–1; Montoya, *The Theology of Food* 115–6, 145–8.

<sup>58</sup> R.S. Thomas, 'When we are weak, we are' in *Counterpoint* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1990), 62.

<sup>59</sup> See Roy Kearsley, *Church, Community and Power* (Farnham/Burlington: Ashgate, 2008), 152.

<sup>60</sup> See Mike Higon, *SCM Core Text: Christian Doctrine* (London: SCM Press, 2008), 252–3; Daniel L. Migliore, *The Power of God and the Gods of Power* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008); Stephen Sykes, *Power and Christian Theology* (London/New York: Continuum, 2006); Rick F. Talbott, *Jesus, Paul, and Power: Rhetoric, Ritual, and Metaphor in Ancient Mediterranean Christianity* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2010); John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994), 134–61; Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 68, 81–2; Walter Brueggemann, 'Impossibility' and

The Supper recalls that the Church is

the most vulnerable of all communities, roaming through the world with no place of its own, suspended over the abyss of nonbeing, upheld solely by a Word that calls it continually into being. It is a church whose identity lies outside itself, whose institutional continuity is not a possession but an eschatological promise ... Without a time, without a place. The church of Jesus Christ is the most fragile of all institutions, since its own constitution (so to speak) strictly prohibits any attempt to win for itself institutional security and continuity ... [T]o confess is to venture the risk of obedience. To confess is to stand exposed before the strangeness of the one who calls.<sup>61</sup>

And at this point, Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon offer some challenging words to us:

[The] church is dying a slow death at the hands of pastors who are nice, pastors who are themselves miserable because they are attempting to “help people” with no basis for that help, and no safeguard for themselves, other than their desire to be nice and help people. Indeed, one of us is tempted to think that there is not much wrong with the church that could not be cured by God calling about a hundred really insensitive, uncaring, and offensive people into the ministry!

A better way is for us to be so confident that the gospel is true that we dare not say less to the people we are called to serve.

Power arises from truthfulness. The power of Christian clergy lies, not in their cultural significance, but in their service to the living truth who is Jesus Christ. Although Christianity is not about “liberation” as the world defines it, we are about *power*, and there is no need for a false humility among Christians about our lack of power. Servanthood is power insofar as it is obedience to the One who is the way, the truth, and the life. Clergy must not assume that their disempowerment by the culture means that they have no power. A Christian pastor is a powerful person because only the pastor has been given the authority to serve the eucharist and to preach the Word for the church – to point to the very presence of God among us. That is power.

So the real challenge for clergy is not how to live as powerless persons in a world that recognizes only the power of politics. The challenge is how to be a person who is morally capable of exercising the awesome power of Word and sacrament as bestowed by God and God’s church. Clergy become dangerous when they act as if they are so powerless that they could not hurt people. Imagine a medical student coming to medical school saying, “I want to be a doctor, but I do not want to take any courses in anatomy because I do not enjoy anatomy.” The medical school would say, in effect, “To heck with your personal preferences. We do not want you cutting on people if you do not know anatomy!”

Yet many seminaries allow future pastors to avoid mastery of church history or theology – perhaps because the seminary assumes that, after all, the clergy cannot kill anybody through their ignorance.<sup>62</sup>

## 6. Catholicity

The history of (at least) the Western Church and its current life bears out the claim that the Supper has been the subject of more controversy than has any other facet of its life.<sup>63</sup> There is both shame and irony here: *shame* because the Church is by divine design catholic and because its witness to what the Supper proclaims is undermined by such controversy; *irony* because Jesus is host at only one table and offers us only one cup from which we must all drink. Still, Jesus’ invitation at the Supper remains God’s embrace of all the ways in which our communion is faulty, subverted or betrayed. In bread and wine, he takes into his hands our betrayal, cowardice, isolation, distance and

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Epistemology in the Faith Tradition of Abraham and Sarah (Gen 18:1–15)', *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 94 (1982): 615–634.

<sup>61</sup> Benjamin Myers, "'In his own strange way': Indigenous Australians and the Church's Confession", *Uniting Church Studies* 16, no. 1 (2010), 40, 41.

<sup>62</sup> Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens* 167–8.

<sup>63</sup> Indeed, the variety of names by which the Supper is named itself recalls a story of disunity.

misunderstanding, saying, 'This is my body, given for you'. In spite of the barriers we have erected, the Supper remains a sacrament of unity, joining us together in Christ's triumphant joy.<sup>64</sup>

Since the Day of Pentecost, the Church has been discerned wherever the baptised have 'devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers' (Acts 2.42). On the basis of this early practice, the Church in all ages has identified the Supper as one of the so-called 'marks' of the Church's catholicity. Ignatius of Antioch, for example, who was a student of the Apostle John, insisted that the eucharist is 'the criterion of catholic orthodoxy'.<sup>65</sup> In the following century, Justin Martyr simply assumes that the Church's feast on 'the flesh and blood of that incarnate Jesus' is part of what makes the Church the true household of God.<sup>66</sup> That the Supper served as one of the criteria of the Church's catholicity was also pressed throughout the Middle Ages, and in the evangelical re-discoveries of the sixteenth-century. So while the Second Vatican Council could assert that there is no Eucharist without the priest,<sup>67</sup> those of us who trace our family lineage back to the Reform movement of the sixteenth century will want to affirm the opposite; namely, that there is no priesthood, i.e., no people of God, no Church, without the Supper. And here Rome and Geneva and Wittenberg and Canterbury and Constantinople agree – that the Supper belongs at the very centre of Christian life, worship and witness. In Calvin's famous words: 'Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists'.<sup>68</sup>

It is this truth that many Protestants need to recover for, as Richard Norris rightly observes of a large portion of North American Protestants, 'one gets the impression that nowadays ... the eucharist is for practical purpose viewed with a certain condescension ... It is a phenomenon one is obliged to acknowledge but with which one nevertheless prefers not to be excessively familiar'.<sup>69</sup> Or in the chilling words of R.S. Thomas, 'the spider would run from the chalice, and the wine lie there for a time, cold and unwanted by all ...'.<sup>70</sup>

Why a community claiming to be concerned with the proclamation of God's good news would neglect to *taste* the Word in the Supper each time it gathers to *hear* the Word expounded in human speech truly is an oddity. George Hunsinger suggests – rightly in my view – that 'a preaching office without its eucharistic complement in the weekly liturgy ... [is] like a head without a torso, while a

<sup>64</sup> Jean-Daniel Benoît, *Liturgical Renewal: Studies in Catholic and Protestant Developments on the Continent* (ed. Geoffrey W.H. Lampe; trans. Edwin Hudson; Studies in Ministry and Worship; London: SCM Press, 1958), 16.

<sup>65</sup> K. Paul Wesche, 'The Eucharist as the Criterion of Orthodoxy: A Study of St. Ignatius of Antioch' in *Marks of the Body of Christ* (ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 74. To be sure, Ignatius taught that the Church is constituted, or at least manifested locally, around the Bishop celebrating the Eucharist.

<sup>66</sup> L.W. Barnard, *Justin Martyr: His Life and Thought* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 147.

<sup>67</sup> See Hunsinger, *Eucharist and Ecumenism* 114–5. Luther, of course, would radically qualify – or extend – this notion in his argument that the priest symbolised the priesthood of all believers, while possessing no special powers of consecration and sacrifice *in and of himself*. See Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 35: Word and Sacrament 1* (ed. J.J. Pelikan, et al.; vol. 35; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 100–1. Hunsinger properly notes that Luther upheld the idea of grace alone by combining christological mediation with communal participation. Hunsinger, *Eucharist and Ecumenism* 135. Calvin and those who theologised in his wake sought to witness to how the cross and the eucharist are held in a unity that does not violate but reinforces their distinction via two forms: The constitutive form is the cross while the mediating form is the eucharist. See Hunsinger, *Eucharist and Ecumenism* 151; Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation* 82; George Hunsinger, 'The Dimension of Depth: Thomas F. Torrance on the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 54 (2001), 155–76.

<sup>68</sup> Calvin, *Inst.* IV.i.9; cf. Joseph D. Small, 'A Church of the Word and Sacrament' in *Christian Worship in Reformed Churches Past and Present* (ed. Lukas Vischer; Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003), 311–23; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion, 1536 Edition* (trans. Ford Lewis Battles; Grand Rapids: The H.H. Meeter Centre for Calvin Studies/Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1975), IV.7; Calvin, *Inst.* IV.xiv.16–17; Jason A. Goroncy, 'John Calvin: Servant of the Word' in *Calvin Rediscovered* (ed. Murray Rae and Peter Matheson; Hindmarsh: ATF Press, 2011), forthcoming.

<sup>69</sup> Richard A. Norris, 'The Eucharist in the Church' in *Marks of the Body of Christ* (ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 83.

<sup>70</sup> R.S. Thomas, 'Poste Restante' in *Collected Poems, 1945–1990* (London: Dent, 1993), 272.

sacramental priestly office without a robust liturgy of the Word would be much the reverse. It has been said, not without justice, that Protestants have their religion too much in their heads. If Calvin rather than Zwingli were our liturgical guide, he would be taken seriously when he wrote that the eucharist should be received “very often, and at least [*ad minimum*] once a week” (*Inst.* IV.17.43).<sup>71</sup>

### 7. Martyrdom

To take up Jesus’ invitation to eat and drink ‘in remembrance of me’ is to do more than simply engage in some quaint liturgical performance. It is to ‘accept living under the sign of the cross and in the hope of resurrection. It is to accept the meaning of a life lived to the point of death – at the hands of the powerful of this world – for love of others’.<sup>72</sup>

Whenever the community discards its linen clothes but retains its body, whenever it turns one cheek but not the other, whenever it forgives seven times but not eight, whenever it gives a coat but not a cloak, whenever it walks one mile but not two, whenever it keeps a reserve of scarce resources for a rainy day, and whenever it exchanges the garments of joy for the protection of the state, it attracts the danger of being turned from God’s witness into God’s whore. Moreover, the Supper reminds God’s people that the way we best serve the world is not by becoming more like it but rather by becoming more unlike it. It reminds us that the only way the world can know that it is ‘the world’ is if the Church is ‘the Church’.<sup>73</sup> Only when the Church is ‘the Church’ – i.e., a people who embody a different form of politics – might the world be given a vision of an alternative way of being that recognises the necessity for repentance. This is the reality that martyrdom gifts to the world, for this is the kind of gift that exposes false cities from the true one in an effort to bring all cities under Christ’s rule.<sup>74</sup>

I believe that whenever the community fashions its life in the shadow of the Supper, it is loving the world that God loves. It is also freely offering its body in ‘the full knowledge that its body is always already the broken body of Christ’. As Craig Hovey points out, ‘Like baptism, not only is the Eucharist a preparation for Christian death, but it is so by constituting a new kind of life, unbounded by fear. It is no accident that the Last Supper immediately precedes the temptations of the garden’.<sup>75</sup>

My point here is simple: the Eucharist is a meal for would-be martyrs, a last supper, if you like, for those whose life is shaped by the narrative of love’s good news. It is a meal given to make life intelligible. Little wonder that many of the martyrs in the early Church – and today – regarded the Supper as the essential preparation for the coming persecution, as ‘an invitation to, and the beginnings of, the heavenly banquet of which they were about to partake in full’.<sup>76</sup> The body reconfigured in the liturgy of the Supper is a body whose doxological response is a revolt against the

<sup>71</sup> Hunsinger, *Eucharist and Ecumenism* 325; cf. Neuhaus, *Freedom for Ministry* 157; Forrester, *Theological Fragments* 109–10.

<sup>72</sup> Gutiérrez, ‘Liberating Evangelization’, 248–9.

<sup>73</sup> See Karl Barth, *Insights: Karl Barth’s Reflections on the Life of Faith* (ed. Eberhard Busch; trans. O.C. Dean Jr.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 90. Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts* (trans. John Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 461.

<sup>74</sup> See Tripp York, *The Purple Crown: The Politics of Martyrdom* (Polyglossia: Radical Reformation Theologies; Herald Press, 2007), 98, 114–15; Alasdair MacIntyre, ‘A Partial Response to My Critics’ in *After MacIntyre* (ed. John Horton and Susan Mendus; Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 303; William Cavanaugh, ‘Killing for the Telephone Company: Why the Nation-State is not the Keeper of the Common Good’, *Modern Theology* 20, no. 2 (2004), 243–74; William Cavanaugh, ‘Dying for the Eucharist or Being Killed by It?: Romero’s Challenge to First-World Christians’, *Theology Today* 58, no. 2 (2001), 177–89; William Cavanaugh, ‘Sacrifice and the Social Imagination in Early Modern Europe’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31, no. 3 (2001), 585–605; William Cavanaugh, ‘The Liturgies of Church and State’, *Liturgy* 20, no. 1 (2005), 25–30; William Cavanaugh, ‘The World in a Wafer: A Geography of the Eucharist as Resistance to Globalization’, *Modern Theology* 15, no. 2 (1999), 181–196.

<sup>75</sup> Craig Hovey, *To Share in the Body: A Theology of Martyrdom for Today’s Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2008), 92–3.

<sup>76</sup> Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist* 225–6.

privation of all that is good in the world. It is a body, therefore, always ready to be put to death, not as a victim but as a martyr, and as a martyr because it is a body that envisions an apocalyptic hope in the final imitation of Christ; namely, resurrection and ascension.

The fact that we have eaten since we last gathered around Christ's Table should be experienced as something of what Jamie Smith calls 'a kind of sanctified letdown. For every week that we celebrate the Eucharist is another week that the kingdom and its feast have not yet fully arrived. And every week the words of institution remind us of this fact, for we do it "until he comes"'.<sup>77</sup> Insofar as this is true, it is the meal for those whose lives are constituted by hope. And hope is the final thing that I wish to highlight about what the Supper proclaims.

### 8. Hope

To be the people of God is to be a people for whom the liveliness of hope defines a way of being. From within the Reformed tradition out of which I speak, the liveliness of hope is sustained by God through the ministry of Sermon, Baptism and Supper.<sup>78</sup> While hope must encompass all of life and is therefore not reducible to Word and sacraments, there can be no experience of Christian hope apart from Word and sacraments and, therefore, apart from Christian community.

Moreover, the Supper reminds the Jesus Community that it is called to be shaped more by its future than by its past. In the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 'The church of Christ witnesses to the end of all things. It lives from the end, it thinks from the end, it acts from the end, it proclaims its message from the end ... The church speaks within the old world about the new world. And because it is surer of the new world than of anything else, it sees the old world only in the light of the new world'.<sup>79</sup> This is not to denigrate the past or the present, for all of history is gathered up into God's redemption. But it is to aver that the Community is most truly itself not when it looks back to the first, or to the sixteenth, century but when it lifts its gaze to the horizon to squint hopefully for the future coming of God in the new creation. The Supper assists the Community to see that both past and future are held together in God who, as on the Emmaus road, stands among us and says 'Peace be with you ... Have you anything here to eat?' (Luke 24.36, 41). The Supper of the hoping Church is 'the eschatological sign of the coming kingdom in history',<sup>80</sup> a symbol of the coming *shalom* feast of the nations and the beginning and foretaste of the kingdom's universal banquet in which all humanity will feast. To gather around this Table is to anticipate the day when every knee will bow and every tongue confess, and when the kingdom of the world becomes 'the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ' (Rev 11.15). To gather around this Table, therefore, is to experience the transformation of time itself. This is because the feast is held in the presence of the Lord of history who carries those around the Table into his own eschatological time from before the foundation of the world to his wilderness feast on the Sinai Peninsula, to his table fellowship and death in Palestine, to his liberating power which comes to us from the future and opens up new and as-yet-unknown possibilities.

There is a good reason why some parts of the Church refer to the Supper as the 'eucharist', for *eucharistos* means thankful. When we gather around the Table we are, in freedom, thankfully anticipating the joy of the new creation, the joy of the fulness of the Son's gift to the Father – i.e., the reconciliation of all things. We are thankful that in the coming of the Spirit, creation has begun

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<sup>77</sup> Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom* 200.

<sup>78</sup> The Reformed tradition's reluctance to step outside of these dominically-ordered sacraments is salutary amid a culture and a Church struggling with an over-emphasis on subjective authority and the privatisation and de-ecclesialisation of faith and life.

<sup>79</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1–3* (ed. John W. de Gruchy; trans. Douglas Stephen Bax; Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works; vol. 3; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 21.

<sup>80</sup> Moltmann, *Church in the Power of the Spirit* 251; cf. Moltmann, *Church in the Power of the Spirit* 243, 253.

to be conscious of its charismatic renewal and commission. One practical implication of this has been noted:

If Eucharist as giving thanks were central in our celebration of the Lord's Supper, we might find ourselves dancing in the aisles, clapping our hands, and becoming carried away in the exuberance of the moment. Perhaps one of the reasons Reformed Protestants are often characterized as 'God's frozen chosen' is that we do not celebrate Eucharist frequently enough to be formed as a grateful people. Without Eucharist, we put too much emphasis on what we accomplish, upon our duty and responsibility. When we do celebrate the sacrament of Holy Communion, we often do so with a funeral attitude that focuses upon the death of Christ and forgets that the sacrament is also a resurrection meal. One sign of hope is that many of the newer Communion hymns are joyful. The sad and grim focus of so many Communion services may be one reason that we want to limit their frequency. Who wants those doleful services any more often than absolutely necessary?<sup>81</sup>

#### IV. Some concluding thoughts ...

It has been proposed that 'seminaries have produced clergy who are agents of modernity, experts in the art of congregational adaptation to the cultural status-quo, enlightened facilitators whose years of education have trained them to enable believers to detach themselves from the insights, habits, stories and structures that make the church the church'.<sup>82</sup> If this assessment is right, then one challenge for church leaders and teachers is to help to keep communities of faith earthed in the habits, stories and structures that make the Church the Church. Generations of believers have testified that Pulpit, Font and Table are the language that God uses to communicate to us, to form us more fully into the *imago christi* and, in Hauerwas' words, to 'educate Christians in liberal societies'.<sup>83</sup> These are the language spaces through which God teaches us to put to death our tribal loyalties. These are the language spaces through which God teaches us to beat our swords into ploughshares, and our spears into pruning hooks.<sup>84</sup> These are the language spaces through which God teaches us to welcome the naked and the hungry, the prisoner and the refugee. These are the language spaces through which God reminds us that God is not immune to the world's deepest suffering and that even the grave is not unfamiliar territory to God. These are the language spaces through which God announces that the kingdom belongs to the poor, that those who weep now will laugh and those who laugh now will weep. These are the language spaces through which God commands us to love our enemies and do good to those who hate us, to bless those who curse us, and to pray for those who make life hell for us. These are the language spaces through which God says 'Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back' (Luke 6.30). These are the language spaces of the new covenant wherein God and humanity are pledged to be to one another a sign of unconditional love.

<sup>81</sup> Howard L. Rice and James C. Huffstutler, *Reformed Worship* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2001), 71.

<sup>82</sup> Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: A provocative Christian assessment of culture and ministry for people who know that something is wrong* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 116; cf. Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens* 170–1.

<sup>83</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *After Christendom? How the Church is to /behave if Freedom, Justice and a Christian Nation are Bad Ideas* (Sydney: Anzea, 1991), 133–52. I think that Jamie Smith's thesis, in *Desiring the Kingdom*, is basically right. To be baptised into the liturgical life of the community is to be immersed into its habit-forming practices, practices which are invitational, which are undertaken with a view to fostering transformation of both mind and performance, and have something like what we might call eschatological reserve or groan. In other words, they are the gift of the Spirit, and so bear the print of the Spirit's hand. To participate in the Supper is a profound 'Yes' to what the Spirit desires to do; namely, to lift us up to, and maintain in us a living vision of, the ascended Christ. See Gerrit Scott Dawson, *Jesus Ascended: The Meaning of Christ's Continuing Incarnation* (London/Phillipsburg: T&T Clark/P&R Publishing, 2004), 180.

<sup>84</sup> Isa 2.4; Mic 4.3. So Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Where Resident Aliens Live: Exercises for Christian Practice* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 42: 'How can we get up from the table of unity and be willing to kill one another in the name of loyalties that are not loyalties to Christ? What would it mean to rise from the table of unity we call Eucharist and kill one another in the name of national loyalties? Is it any wonder that the world does not take Christians seriously when we do so – because the world knows in effect we are the world's not God's'.

I believe that faith is celebrated and faith's loves embodied in the practices of community-forming liturgies, whereby we dramatise our graced convictions and spur each other on to participate in, and to be continually recreated by, the faith which has taken hold of us. At the core of this action, I have suggested, is the Supper, that event around which communities gather to remember, and to be remembered. It is the event through which the walls of death are breached and the first fruits of a new reconciled humanity experience God's gathering of a 'deep communion of existence'.<sup>85</sup> It is the event in which God gives us God's body and therein makes us one. It is the event in which the Community is generated, where God 'never ceases to be found anew' and where 'the Church is most compactly herself'.<sup>86</sup> It is the event where, in all the cultural flux of our times, where in the midst of spiritual pessimism, where in the massed choir of competing voices that is our digital cyber-inhabited environment, where in our confusion, anxiety and driven existence, we are given a place to gather and regain a sense of perspective. It is the event that holds out against the centrifugal forces of a world complex and dangerous, self-destructively greedy and unable to curb the human appetite to possess, and that calls us to embrace the imperative to be on the side of life.<sup>87</sup>

I wish to share one final quotation. It comes from Walter Brueggemann:

At the table we eat and drink to another reality and toward another order ... if we are to understand *shalom* at all, we shall understand it at the table. It is at the table as nowhere else that we get our minds off ourselves long enough to think of God's promises and God's tasks. Most of the time the church is busy worrying about well-being, survival, reputation, success. At the table, we occasionally put those temptations in perspective and see that they do not really matter. No doubt it is not possible for us as the church, any more than any other community, to live always with that demanding reassuring awareness. But what a marvel and a gift! We have given to us and can value that moment of truth when we come face-to-face with realities that let us break free of our immobilizing self-preoccupation.

At the table as nowhere else we are made aware that true life is in mystery and not in management. At the table there is no worry about numbers of members or budget, but only the reminder of meanings given that we don't have to explain or manufacture. It is overpowering, when we reflect on it, that all the key verbs in that drama have [Jesus] as subject and not us. We are the subject of no important active verbs at the table. He took and he blessed and he broke and he gave to us again. It is his table; we are welcome guests, and we don't fix the menu or pay the bill.

It follows that at the table, as nowhere else, we are the Lord's, not ours. We are not ours, and he is not ours. We need not worry there about our destiny. We do not have to justify our existence there.<sup>88</sup>

As a feast of divine generosity, the Supper reminds the Community that it lives by God alone. As a feast of creation's bounty, the Supper evokes God's determination for a covenant partner. As a feast which redefines the human narrative, the Supper recalls that the meaning given to our lives comes via the announcement that creation is the object of the divine drama, a story in which the people of God have a unique role to play. As a feast open to the world, it demonstrates the community's posture of hospitality to all. As a feast incontrovertibly bound up with the crucifixion of Jesus, the Supper forces us to rethink our categories of power and weakness. As a feast embracing the entire Community, the Supper exposes the Community's catholicity. As a feast grounded in the economy of cruciform love and celebrated amidst the world's violence, the Supper always retains the possibility

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<sup>85</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Called to Communion: Understanding the Church Today* (trans. Adrian Walker; San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), 37.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* 37.

<sup>87</sup> See James M. Gordon, *Where in the world? The table, is where* [2010 (cited 30 December 2010)]; Online: [http://livingwittily.typepad.com/my\\_weblog/2010/12/heading-towards-new-year-ive-been-thinking-about-the-church-where-in-all-the-cultural-flux-of-the-times-where-in-the-midst.html](http://livingwittily.typepad.com/my_weblog/2010/12/heading-towards-new-year-ive-been-thinking-about-the-church-where-in-all-the-cultural-flux-of-the-times-where-in-the-midst.html).

<sup>88</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Peace* (Atlanta: Chalice Press, 2001), 153–4. Also published in a modified form in Walter Brueggemann, *Living Toward a Vision: Biblical Reflections on Shalom* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1982), 143ff.



of being our last meal. And finally, as a feast open to the future it demonstrates the Community's universal hope. To celebrate the Supper is to do no less than to 'share even now in love's victory'.<sup>89</sup>

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Dunedin, February 2011

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<sup>89</sup> Timothy Radcliffe, *The Bread of Love* [2009 (cited 13 December 2010)]; Online: [http://torch.op.org/preaching\\_sermon\\_item.php?sermon=5464&ref=date](http://torch.op.org/preaching_sermon_item.php?sermon=5464&ref=date).

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