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## Overcoming the Division: The Relationship between the Eucharist and Social Justice

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OVERCOMING THE DIVISION:  
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE EUCHARIST AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

by

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Director: Dr. Michon Matthiesen

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A Thesis Submitted to Fulfill the Requirements of the Master of Arts in Theology  
Providence College

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## CHAPTER ONE: Introductory Chapter

What is the defining characteristic of a “good” Catholic Christian? Is it one’s regular participation in the Church’s official worship, the liturgy, accompanied by an intense personal prayer life? Or, is it one’s concrete commitment to social justice causes and how one engages in works of charity? The question is intentionally provocative and the answer is not clear-cut, for Catholics are called both to worship God chiefly in the Eucharistic liturgy and to love Him in the least of these.<sup>1</sup> Neither worship nor social justice is optional, yet there seems to be a great divide between these two essential aspects of Catholic life—a chasm between the so-called vertical and horizontal dimensions of faith. On the one hand, the vertical dimension is associated with one’s direct and personal relationship with God and involves participating in the sacraments, Eucharistic adoration, and devotions such as the Rosary or the Stations of the Cross; honoring the saints; and cultivating private prayer. On the other hand, the horizontal dimension commonly refers to how one demonstrates faith in Christ by serving and loving others and includes a special concern for the poor and suffering. Recently, the gap between the reputed vertical and horizontal dimensions of faith has entered the spotlight due to the comparisons between Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI and Pope Francis; the former allegedly representing the vertical dimension and the importance of worship and the latter embodying the horizontal dimension and care for the suffering. Many both within and outside the Church have tried to pit the pontificates against each other, show their supposed discontinuity, and often strongly favor one over the other. In truth however, while their tones or styles may differ, both pontiffs live out both dimensions of

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Matthew 25: 31-46.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Benedict XVI invited the homeless of Rome to a meal with him at the Vatican on December 26, 2010 and he often spoke and wrote about the importance of charity, including in *Deus Caritas Est* and

faith personally and value them in the life of the Church.<sup>2</sup> As our Holy Fathers teach us, neither the vertical dimension nor the horizontal dimension is sufficient by itself and each requires the other. To identify one's Catholicity with only one of these aspects is a completely misguided—even unjust—approach to living out one's faith.

The goal of the present research is to articulate the inseparable connection between worship and justice—between the vertical and horizontal dimensions of faith—as is revealed and celebrated in the Eucharist, the Church's greatest act of worship permeated by numerous social justice implications and references. The current division between worship and social justice into two separate realms of Catholic life poses a serious problem for the Church. Fr. Walter Burghardt addresses the issue in his essay, "Worship and Justice Reunited": "In large measure, liturgists and social activists occupy two separate camps, and our Catholic people are tragically unaware that in the Catholic vision liturgy and justice belong together, and that one without the other is not completely Catholic."<sup>3</sup> A failure to unite worship and justice does a great disservice to the Catholic faithful who are unable to recognize the integrity of the faith. What happens during the Mass in the confines of the church's four walls must always be seen as being related to and affecting how Catholics live and serve those around them everyday and vice versa; they are not insular, disjointed occurrences. Furthermore, if the unity of worship and justice is not recognized and upheld, then the advancement of the Church's mission in the world is impeded, for her worship makes her social justice activities

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<sup>2</sup> For example, Benedict XVI invited the homeless of Rome to a meal with him at the Vatican on December 26, 2010 and he often spoke and wrote about the importance of charity, including in *Deus Caritas Est* and *Sacramentum Caritatis*. For his part, Francis has not neglected the importance of the Eucharist and it has been a focal point of some of his General Audiences, including on February 12, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Walter J. Burghardt, S.J., "Worship and Justice Reunited," in *Liturgy and Justice: To Worship God in Spirit and Truth*, ed. Anne Y. Koester (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2002), 34- 35.

fruitful and readies the faithful to build the Kingdom of God on earth in the here-and-now.

As will be discussed in following chapters, the separation between worship and justice in the life of the Church has not always been so severe. For now, it is useful to offer, in brief, a few possible reasons for the apparent divide between liturgical worship and social justice. One reason concerns the growing privatization of religion. In “Celebrating Justice: the Sacramental Connection,” Kristen Dempsey notes that the privatization of religion severs the connection between one’s personal relationship with God and all other aspects of one’s life, including involvement in politics, economics, and any social justice cause:

The people who uphold privatization already see religion as belonging only to themselves as individuals, and they view the liturgy as simply a means for each person to have a closer and more personal connection to God. Because social justice involves action beyond oneself, privatization runs wholly contrary to the idea that liturgy and social justice are intimately related.<sup>4</sup>

Dempsey also identifies the seeming conflict between divine and human activity as another reason for the separation between liturgy and justice. Some people who do not recognize the close relationship between worship and justice argue that God affects the world only directly and does not work through human agents.<sup>5</sup> Since they consider worship to be primarily a means of influencing God’s action, there is no sense that their encounter with God in the liturgy prepares them to carry on His work to transform the world. This understanding fails to recognize how God in the liturgy uses both ordinary things such as bread and wine and people as His instruments. He is not removed or uninvolved in the world’s affairs, but He continues to be at work in them through His

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<sup>4</sup> Kristen Dempsey, “Celebrating Justice: the Sacramental Connection,” *Journal of Theta Alpha Kappa* 33, no. 1 (March 1, 2009): 56.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

creation. The liturgy can never merely be understood as an end in itself. Rather, it is the means by which humans encounter God and are transformed into His instruments, cooperating with God to establish a more just world.

How one understands the relationship between the individual, the community, and the wider world also affects how one understands the relationship between worship and justice. According to John P. Hogan, an overemphasis on transubstantiation and Christ's presence in the elements of bread and wine has weakened the connection between the celebration of the Eucharist and social justice: "Could it be that we have let a too individualistic and therapeutic emphasis on "real presence" obscure the deeper meaning of Christ's presence and action in us as a community of believers?"<sup>6</sup> When the reception of Holy Communion is only understood to be a close, personal encounter with the Lord that primarily causes one to feel good, then the transformative effect of the Eucharist and the community's identity as the living Body of Christ in the world, an identity effected by Baptism and participation in the Eucharistic liturgy, is diminished. Still, Judith A. Merkle in her essay, "The Eucharist and Justice" claims that in modern times, many people, including those raised valuing liturgical worship, do not recognize any connection between religious institutions and a more just society, between a worshipping community and the condition of the rest of the world:

These people are not very confident that the church has much to offer them in the pursuit of a better world. They link the sacramental practice of the church and its necessity to this same peripheral position. The Eucharist is a nice but luxurious extra to the real matter of action for justice.<sup>7</sup>

When participation in the Eucharist is considered expendable, the unity of worship and

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<sup>6</sup> John P. Hogan, "The Eucharist and Social Justice," in *Romero's Legacy: The Call to Peace and Justice*, ed. Pilar Hogan Closkey and John P. Hogan (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007), 27.

<sup>7</sup> Judith A. Merkle, "The Eucharist and Justice," *Liturgical Ministry* 17, no. 3 (June 1, 2008): 133.



justice is certainly lost.

Another reason for the separation between the liturgy and justice stems from a failure to articulate the connection in many official Church documents.<sup>8</sup> Although Vatican II prioritized the renewal of the liturgy, for example, the Council Fathers “failed to wrestle with fundamental questions concerning the life of the liturgy and dealt with marginal issues and structure of the liturgy. It missed the connection between justice and the liturgy.”<sup>9</sup> Regrettably, the process of the Council and the chronology of the documents did not clarify the close relationship; *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, was promulgated on December 4, 1963, while *Gaudium et Spes*, the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, was promulgated at the close of the Council on December 7, 1965. At best, the Council Fathers assumed the relationship between liturgical worship and social justice. The Church’s social encyclicals, beginning with Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum* in 1891, also do not give any substantial attention to the Eucharist’s role in the Church’s social doctrine.<sup>10</sup> Reflecting on the true unity of worship and justice as exemplified by Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador, who was killed while offering the sacrifice of the Mass, Rowenda Hill comments that in papal social encyclicals “liturgy and the sacraments are conspicuous by their absence.”<sup>11</sup> When the connection is not made explicit, a separation—unintentional, though it may be—ensues.

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<sup>8</sup> John Paul II’s *Mane Nobiscum Domine* and Benedict XVI’s *Sacramentum Caritatis* are among the few exceptions. Yet, the connection has yet to be received fully into the Church’s general consciousness overall.

<sup>9</sup> Martha Kastner, “The Eucharist and Social Justice,” *Journal of Theta Alpha Kappa* 17, no. 1 (March 1, 1993): 21-22.

<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that many social encyclicals are addressed to not just the Church’s official members, but also to “all men of good will.” The broad audience partly explains why the Eucharist is not emphasized.

<sup>11</sup> Rowenda Hill, “Poured Out for You: Liturgy and Justice in the Life of Archbishop Romero,” *Worship* 75, no. 5 (September 1, 2000): 415.

Division among members of the Church herself certainly serves as another reason for the disunity between liturgical worship and concern for social justice issues. This reason is related to how political labels are applied to Catholicism, particularly in America. It is assumed—and, often true—that “conservative” Catholics prioritize the liturgy and the vertical dimension of faith, while “liberal” Catholics prioritize social justice and the horizontal dimension of faith. On two opposite ends of the spectrum, “conservative” and “liberal” Catholics are not united and, thus, neither are their values. Discussing the future of the Church in the twenty-first century, John Allen suggests that the situation is even more complex and that multiple tribes, as opposed to just two camps of liberals and conservatives, exist within Catholicism. Among the tribes he names are “liturgical traditionalists” and “peace and justice Catholics” who are preoccupied with “attending their own meetings, reading their own publications, and following their own heroes, generally viewing the other tribes with a mixture of disinterest and suspicion.”<sup>12</sup> Herein lies one of the root causes for the division between those who prioritize the liturgy and the vertical dimension of faith and those who prioritize social justice and the horizontal dimension of faith. Instead of supporting one another and working together to build the Kingdom of God, they work in isolation from each other and, as a result, both of their efforts suffer—and more importantly, so does Christ’s mission as continued by His Church.

Admittedly, the term “social justice” can be vague and allusive. For the purposes of this research, I am defining social justice most broadly as love and service of neighbor, most especially the poor and the suffering. I will not be discussing the Eucharist in

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<sup>12</sup> John L. Allen, Jr. *The Future Church: How Ten Trends Are Revolutionizing the Catholic Church* (New York: Image, 2009), 454.

relation to one social justice issue in particular, but rather as the Eucharist illuminates working for social justice as a whole.<sup>13</sup> My concept of social justice is chiefly formed by the principles of the Church's social doctrine as presented in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace prioritizes the dignity of the human person; the common good, which includes the universal destination of goods and the preferential option for the poor; subsidiarity; and solidarity.<sup>14</sup> My understanding of social justice also follows the seven principles of Catholic social teaching as outlined by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: the life and dignity of the human person; call to family, community, and participation; rights and responsibilities; option for the poor and vulnerable; the dignity of work and the rights of workers, solidarity; care for God's creation.<sup>15</sup> Some of these themes, namely the dignity of the human person, the preferential option for the poor, and solidarity, hold a more prominent position in my understanding of social justice and this will be reflected in my research. For this reason, it is important to introduce briefly these three themes in the hopes of providing a more complete functioning definition of social justice. The dignity of the human person results from the fact that each person is created by God in His image and likeness and is redeemed by Christ; he or she is unique and unrepeatable, enjoys the unity of body and soul, and exists in intimate relationship with God and other people.<sup>16</sup> The option for the poor and vulnerable refers to giving preference and priority to the needs of the least among us; it demands that we imitate Christ's love for the poor

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<sup>13</sup> This is not to say, however, that I will not mention topics like hunger, for example, when appropriate.

<sup>14</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Washington D.C.: USCCB Publishing, 2004): n.105-196.

<sup>15</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions," *USCCB.org*, last modified June 19, 1998, <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/sharing-catholic-social-teaching-challenges-and-directions.cfm>.

<sup>16</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, n.105-149.

and give them what is rightfully theirs.<sup>17</sup> The principle of solidarity highlights the unity and interdependence of the human family and how all have responsibility for one another and share in each other's sufferings.<sup>18</sup>

A definition of social justice cannot neglect either aspect of the term. The word “social” is a reminder that people are created for and permanently exist in relationship to others: “For by natural constitution the human person is a social being who cannot live or develop without relations with others.”<sup>19</sup> Justice, however, must permeate interpersonal relationships within society. According to Aquinas, justice is a virtue that “is concerned only about our dealings with others.”<sup>20</sup> Justice requires respect for the rights of others and that one voluntarily and consistently gives others—both God and fellow man—what is rightfully due to them.<sup>21</sup> When social, political, and economic conditions both foster and are formed by justice, men and women are better able to live in right, harmonious relationship. It should also be noted that Aquinas defines the virtue of religion as that by which man gives to God the worship and honor that belongs to Him.<sup>22</sup> He argues that religion “is reckoned a part of justice which is a moral virtue.”<sup>23</sup> Religion falls under justice because paying the highest worship and honor to God is what is rightfully due to Him. It is often remembered that religion entails the worship of God, but it is often forgotten that religion is a requirement of justice. Therefore, worship itself cannot be separated from justice and is actually a matter of it.

Although liturgical worship and social justice exist in a mutual relationship and

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., n.182-184.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., n.192-196.

<sup>19</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 12.

<sup>20</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 58, a.1.

<sup>21</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1807.

<sup>22</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 81, a.4.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., a.5.

are incomplete without each other, primacy belongs to the Eucharist. The Eucharist demands and provides substance to the work of social justice. In the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council deem the liturgy to be “the first and necessary source from which believers can imbibe the true Christian spirit.”<sup>24</sup> Through participation in the Eucharist, an intimate encounter with Christ, one develops an authentic Christian spirit, which certainly includes a loving concern for the oppressed and ostracized members of society. In a very similar vein, the Council Fathers in the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* also describe the Eucharist as “the source and culmination of all Christian life.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, the Council Fathers recognize that the Eucharist impels one to work for social justice and social justice must be rooted in and directed towards the Eucharist. It is both the fundamental origin and climax of all social justice activities, movements, and apostolates.<sup>26</sup> The sacred liturgy serves as the foundation of the Church’s entire mission. Social justice does not necessarily commit an individual to the Eucharist. By its very nature, however, “the Eucharist commits us to the poor.”<sup>27</sup> The proper ordering of worship and justice, therefore, is important.

Social justice activities can only bear lasting fruit when they are grounded in the worship of God, most especially in the Eucharistic liturgy. As Dr. Donald DeMarco argues, “We cannot sustain the effect without constantly renewing the cause.”<sup>28</sup> Only Christ in the Eucharist truly empowers social justice. Everything that Catholic Christians do to serve the poor and the least of these can never be devoid of a relationship to Christ

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<sup>24</sup> *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 14.

<sup>25</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 11.

<sup>26</sup> *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 84.

<sup>27</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1397.

<sup>28</sup> Donald DeMarco, “Social Justice and the Primacy of the Eucharist,” *Father Michael McGivney Catholic Academy*, accessed February 3, 2014, [http://fmmh.ycdsb.ca/teachers/fmmh\\_mcmanaman/pages/demeuch.html](http://fmmh.ycdsb.ca/teachers/fmmh_mcmanaman/pages/demeuch.html).

in the Eucharist. If the relationship is absent, then the efforts fall short of their true potential. Aquinas's insights are helpful in this regard, as he identifies the Eucharist as the sacrament of charity.<sup>29</sup> In his treatment of the theological virtues, he also argues, "no true virtue is possible without charity."<sup>30</sup> Thus, justice, including social justice, fails if it is not accompanied by charity—if it is not united to the sacrament of charity. In every act of charity, one loves another person for the sake of God and the grace to do this flows from the Eucharist. Authentic love for others is always grounded in love for God and is a reflection of God's love for humanity. As it makes present the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, the Eucharist is the remembrance of God's compassion and mercy for all and thereby "gives rise to a service of charity."<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, the Eucharist is primary, as one cannot give to others what one does not first have oneself. In the Eucharist, one receives the flesh and blood of the One who gave His life up for the life of the world and the strength and the courage to do likewise: "The Christian mandate is clear: first avail yourself of His Life, then, bring that very Life to others. Everything begins and has its vivifying root in Christ."<sup>32</sup> In order to be Christ's hands and feet, one must be conformed all the more to Christ and it is precisely this conformation that the reception of the Eucharist makes possible. One receives His Body to be His Body in the world.

In the following chapters, I will demonstrate how social justice and worship—how the so-called horizontal and vertical dimensions of faith—come together in the celebration of the Eucharist from the perspective that the Eucharist takes precedence. To

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<sup>29</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 73, a.3.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 23, a.7.

<sup>31</sup> *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 88.

<sup>32</sup> Donald DeMarco, "Social Justice and the Primacy of the Eucharist," *Father Michael McGivney Catholic Academy*, accessed February 3, 2014, [http://fmmh.ycdsb.ca/teachers/fmmh\\_mcmanaman/pages/demeuch.html](http://fmmh.ycdsb.ca/teachers/fmmh_mcmanaman/pages/demeuch.html).

do so, I will first discuss the intimate relationship between worship and justice as understood in Scripture and the early Church. After acknowledging the accomplishments of the 20<sup>th</sup> century liturgist and social reformer, Virgil Michel, I will proceed to examine several specific Eucharistic-social justice connections and themes, namely the inclusivity and unity of the Body of Christ, the importance of food, the eschatological nature of the Eucharist, reconciliation and peace, and sacrifice. Then, I will describe the transformative effect of the Eucharist, which commissions all who partake in the meal to be missionaries for justice. As a means of concluding my research, I will examine parts of the Mass and specific Eucharistic prayer texts in light of social justice themes. For both the sake of the Church and for the poor and suffering throughout the world, the separation between worship and justice cannot continue. It is my hope that the present research will illuminate how intimately related they truly are and will serve to overcome the harmful, needless, and false division.

## CHAPTER TWO: The Relationship between the Eucharist and Social Justice in Scripture and the Early Church

Although the connection has been largely forgotten in mainstream Catholicism, the idea that the Eucharist and social justice are intimately related is by no means novel or innovative. The unity of worship and justice is attested to throughout Scripture and was recognized by the early Church. In this chapter, I will first present how both the Old Testament and the New Testament uphold this close relationship, giving special attention to the prophets, the Last Supper, and St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. From there, I will proceed to illustrate a few examples of the connection between the Eucharist and social justice as described in the writings of the early Church Fathers. The goal of this chapter is to establish the unity of the Eucharist and social justice as deeply rooted in the Christian faith.

In Scripture, the concept of justice most frequently refers to being in right relationship with God and fellow man.<sup>33</sup> Justice demands that neither relationship be ignored; the soundness of one depends on the validity of the other. If one is not in right relationship with God, then one cannot be in right relationship with others; if one is not in right relationship with others, one also cannot be in right relationship with God. In her essay, "Biblical Justice," Sr. Mary Katherine Birge explains, "If either part of this equation is out of balance, the other is too...injustice arises when the human being fails to meet the demands of either part of the divine-to-human or human-to-human equation."<sup>34</sup> Humans are required to practice justice, as they are created in the image and likeness of

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<sup>33</sup> The Hebrew word *mishpat* is usually translated as "justice," while *tsedakah* is translated as "righteousness." *Mishpat* may be used regarding what is just and right in general, but also specific deeds. *Tsedakah* refers to the attitude that produces the just deed. The two terms are often paralleled. On account of this, I will be using them interchangeably for the purposes of this research.

<sup>34</sup> Mary Katherine Birge, SSJ, "Biblical Justice," in *The Heart of Catholic Social Teaching: Its Origins and Contemporary Significance*, ed. David Matzko McCarthy (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 20.



God. Any justice they demonstrate is a participation in God's own justice.<sup>35</sup> When humans practice justice, they reflect their Creator, who Himself is the origin of all true justice.

The prophets of the Old Testament recognize how essential being in right relationship with others is to being in right relationship with God. It is not enough simply to offer God praise and worship in order to be in right relationship with Him. Rather, being in right relationship with Him demands that this worship is always accompanied by caring for the poor and allowing true justice to permeate human relationships. To the people and leaders of Israel, the prophets make known the consequences of separating the worship of God from social justice and strongly warn against it.<sup>36</sup> Writing around 762 BCE during the reign of King Jeroboam of Israel,<sup>37</sup> Amos warns a wealthy population that they are being judged based on their practice of justice—or more precisely, injustice.<sup>38</sup> He announces how the Lord rejects Israel's worship:

I hate, I despise your religious festivals;  
                   your assemblies are a stench to me.  
 Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings,  
                   I will not accept them.  
 Though you bring choice fellowship offerings,  
                   I will have no regard for them.  
 Away with the noise of your songs!  
                   I will not listen to the music of your harps.  
 But let justice roll on like a river,  
                   righteousness like a never-failing stream!<sup>39</sup>

Severely condemning sins of social injustice and the oppression of the poor by the powerful, Amos makes it clear that the Lord does not accept any of Israel's fundamental

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>36</sup> Margaret Scott, acj, *The Eucharist and Social Justice* (New York: Paulist Press, 2009), 39.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas L. Leclerc, MS, *Introduction to the Prophets: Their Stories, Sayings, and Scrolls* (New York: Paulist Press, 2007), 123.

<sup>38</sup> Birge, "Biblical Justice," 23.

<sup>39</sup> Amos 5: 21-24.

elements of worship, including their festivals, sacrifices, and praises.<sup>40</sup> The Lord utterly disdains worship that is offered to Him by a people who fail to act justly towards one another and neglect the poor. Such worship is empty and mere lip service. Written after 745 BCE but before 722,<sup>41</sup> the prophet Hosea also identifies the close relationship between social justice and authentic worship of God. Like other prophets, Hosea recognizes that justice and care for the oppressed is a requirement of being in a covenantal relationship with the God of Israel.<sup>42</sup> Angered by injustice and violence, the Lord speaks through Hosea:

For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice,  
the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.  
But at Adam they transgressed the covenant;  
there they dealt faithlessly with me.<sup>43</sup>

Hosea prioritizes relationship over meaningless action. Faithfulness to the Covenant does not consist of merely participating in the prescribed rites and offerings, but existing in a close, loving relationship with God and fellow man. Thus, according to both Amos and Hosea, social justice is the prerequisite of acceptable worship.

Overall, the Book of Isaiah is greatly concerned with the theme of social justice. In First Isaiah, set in the second half of the eighth century BCE, the prophet denounces the neglect of the poor, the widow, and the orphan and condemns acts of corruption, violence, greed, and deceit.<sup>44</sup> Instead of justice, the Lord only finds the opposite: bloodshed and the cry of the oppressed.<sup>45</sup> Written after the Babylonian exile and set in Jerusalem and Judah, Third Isaiah explains why God has not acknowledged the people's

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<sup>40</sup> Kastner, "The Eucharist and Social Justice," 23.

<sup>41</sup> Leclerc, *Introduction to the Prophets*, 146.

<sup>42</sup> See Jeremiah as an example. The command to care for the stranger, poor, the orphan, and widow is found in both the Covenant Code in Exodus and in Deuteronomy.

<sup>43</sup> Hosea 6: 6-7.

<sup>44</sup> Leclerc, *Introduction to the Prophets*, 164, 180.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Isaiah 5:7.

worship.<sup>46</sup> God does not desire His people to honor Him just through some external practices such as fasting and praying piously. Rather, He seeks their just treatment of fellow man:

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:  
to loose the chains of injustice  
and untie the cords of the yoke,  
to set the oppressed free  
and break every yoke?  
Is it not to share your food with the hungry,  
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter;  
when you see the naked, to clothe them,  
and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?<sup>47</sup>

Third Isaiah directly links God’s rejection of Israel’s fasting and worship to Israel’s own rejection of the poor.<sup>48</sup> Truly, Third Isaiah serves as a reminder that one must honor God—one must worship God—by the way one cares for the oppressed and strives to practice justice in one’s relationships with other people.

In addition to the prophets already introduced, others identify the connection between social justice and the worship of God. Prophesizing between 742 and 687 BCE,<sup>49</sup> Micah rebukes the people and, especially, the leaders for oppressing the poor and acquiring land and property unfairly. One of the most frequently cited verses from Micah commands the people to act with justice, just as the Lord has instructed them:

He has told you, O mortal, what is good;  
and what does the Lord require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God?<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 360, 366.

<sup>47</sup> Isaiah 58: 6-7.

<sup>48</sup> Birge, “Biblical Justice,” 25.

<sup>49</sup> Leclerc, *Introduction to the Prophets*, 360, 366.

<sup>50</sup> Micah 6:8.

Such conduct, which is marked by living in right relationship to others in society, fostering mercy, and following the commands of the Lord, is what God desires above all else. Fr. Thomas Leclerc summarizes well Micah's understanding of the relationship between justice and worship: "Without justice, kindness, and fidelity, 'burnt offerings...thousands of rams...ten thousand rivers of oil' (Mic 6: 6-7) are meaningless."<sup>51</sup> Called to be a prophet in 627 BCE during King Josiah's reign and ministering until around 587 during King Zedekiah's reign,<sup>52</sup> Jeremiah also speaks about the unity of worship and justice in the southern kingdom of Judah. He connects the oppression of the poor and weak members of society with false worship.<sup>53</sup> The Lord asks sternly, "Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know, and then come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My name?"<sup>54</sup> Such unjust actions are not compatible with giving true worship to the just God of Israel. If justice does not permeate human relationships and if the needs of the poor, the orphan, or the widow are not met, the Lord will punish and destroy Jerusalem.<sup>55</sup> Writing around the same time as Jeremiah, Ezekiel, called to be a prophet as an exile in Babylon in 593,<sup>56</sup> also condemns Israel's failure to treat the poor and oppressed with justice. A truly righteous man—a man who is acceptable to the Lord—repays his debts, does not steal, feeds the hungry, clothes the naked, does not add interest to loans, and judges others' disputes justly.<sup>57</sup> God only

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<sup>51</sup> Leclerc, *Introduction to the Prophets*, 195.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 240-241.

<sup>53</sup> Birge, "Biblical Justice," 24.

<sup>54</sup> Jeremiah 7: 9-10.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Jeremiah 7:6; 21:12.

<sup>56</sup> Leclerc, *Introduction to the Prophets*, 278.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Ezekiel 18: 7-9.

accepts the worship of the just man. If worship is not accompanied by the concrete practice of justice, then it cannot be considered true worship.

Some Wisdom Literature also speaks about the unity of worship and justice. For example, the Book of Sirach, written by Jesus Ben Sira in Jerusalem around 180 BCE,<sup>58</sup> describes how God rejects the sacrifices of the unjust:

If you offer as a sacrifice an animal that you have obtained dishonestly, it is defective and unacceptable. The Most High gets no pleasure from sacrifices made by ungodly people; no amount of sacrifices can make up for their sins. Anyone who steals an animal from the poor to offer as a sacrifice is like someone who kills a boy before his father's eyes. Food means life itself to poor people, and taking it away from them is murder. It is murder to deprive someone of his living or to cheat an employee of his wages.<sup>59</sup>

One cannot steal an animal from the poor in order to offer a sacrifice to God, as depriving the poor of their livelihood is comparable to murder. Sacrificial offerings must be acquired in a spirit of truth and justice, not falsehood and injustice. To offer God an animal that is not rightfully one's own is an act of dishonor and false worship. It destroys one's right relationship with both God and fellow man.

The close relationship between worship and social justice continues to be upheld in the New Testament. In the Gospels, Jesus both prays to His Father and shows concern for the ostracized members of society. Existing in loving relationship to both God the Father and fellow man, Jesus exemplifies the unity of the vertical and horizontal dimensions of faith.<sup>60</sup> In the Sermon on the Mount, for example, Jesus speaks about how right relationship with others is a requirement for giving worship to God: "Therefore, if

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<sup>58</sup> James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*, Third Edition (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 164.

<sup>59</sup> Sirach 34:18-22.

<sup>60</sup> In later chapters, I will discuss in more detail Jesus' relationship to the poor and outcast, including His meals with sinners. Here, I am simply providing some examples of how the life and teachings of Christ point to the intimate relationship between worship and justice.

you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.”<sup>61</sup> Only after one is forgiven by one’s neighbor and peace is restored is one’s offering to God authentic or acceptable. Here, Jesus prioritizes human relationships over empty worship.<sup>62</sup> Despising hypocrisy, Jesus extols as the true worshipper of God the poor widow who, in spite of her poverty, gave her very last coins to the Temple treasury.<sup>63</sup> Religious leaders, on the other hand, who pray aloud for all to see while treating the widow poorly will be punished; they are false worshippers.<sup>64</sup> True love and worship of God is always accompanied by love of neighbor, as the Great Commandment makes clear: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”<sup>65</sup> Love of God without love of neighbor and love of neighbor without love of God is impossible. Margaret Scott summarizes Jesus’ teaching as: “You can’t have one without the other.”<sup>66</sup> In the same way, according to the Christian vision, one cannot have true worship of God without social justice and vice versa. The parable of the Good Samaritan brings attention to this, as Jesus offers the parable in response to a question about love of God and love of neighbor—what is needed to attain eternal life.<sup>67</sup> Both the priest and the Levite pass by the beaten, dying man on the side of the road in the name of purity for worship. Yet, the

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<sup>61</sup> Matthew 5: 23-24.

<sup>62</sup> Kastner, “The Eucharist and Social Justice,” 23.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Mark 12: 41-44; Luke 21: 1-4.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Luke 20: 45-47.

<sup>65</sup> Matthew 22: 37-40. Cf. Mark 12: 28-34; Luke 10: 25-28

<sup>66</sup> Scott, *The Eucharist and Social Justice*, 40.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Luke 10:25-37.

Samaritan—a despised outsider—tends to the man’s wounds and ensures his care as a merciful and compassionate neighbor. Jesus does not champion the inaction of the Jewish religious officials, but rather the concrete action of the Samaritan. Imitating the action of the Good Samaritan is the means by which one inherits eternal life—how one loves both God and neighbor.

One of the greatest examples of the unity of worship and social justice in the life of Christ, and the one that is of the most pertinence to the research at hand, is the Last Supper. The accounts of the Last Supper in the Synoptic Gospels—as well as in St. Paul’s Letter to the Corinthians—include a formal Institution Narrative. With His disciples, Jesus breaks the bread, offers a blessing, gives thanks, and shares the cup; He identifies the bread with His body and the cup with His blood.<sup>68</sup> Even before His death on Calvary, Jesus leaves His disciples with His whole self; His body broken and His blood poured out on the cross are made present sacramentally in the blessed bread and wine. Jesus clarifies the significance of the bread becoming His true body and the wine becoming His own blood. In his encyclical letter, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, Pope John Paul II explains, “Jesus did not simply state that what he was giving them to eat and drink was his body and his blood; he also expressed *its sacrificial meaning* and made sacramentally present his sacrifice which would soon be offered on the Cross for the salvation of all.”<sup>69</sup> The phrases “which is given for you” and “which is poured out for you”<sup>70</sup> highlight how Christ lays His life down for others, but they also serve as a reminder to His disciples to imitate Christ and to give of themselves for the good of

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<sup>68</sup> Cf. Matthew 26: 20-29; Mark 14: 17-25; Luke 22: 14-20; 1 Corinthians 11: 23-25.

<sup>69</sup> *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 12.

<sup>70</sup> Luke 22:19-20.

others. The command to “do this in remembrance of me”<sup>71</sup> is both a directive to ritually celebrate the memorial of the Lord’s Supper and a directive to pour out one’s own life as Christ did. Both are necessary and neither is optional.

While Luke’s dominical command suggests that believers also lay down their lives for others, the Gospel of John makes the imperative clear. Unlike the Synoptic Gospels, John’s Gospel does not include a formal Institution Narrative. Instead, it recounts Jesus washing the feet of His disciples at the Last Supper.<sup>72</sup> Jesus tells His disciples, “Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.”<sup>73</sup> This, too, is a dominical command that cannot be ignored. Just as Jesus tells His disciples to share a meal in remembrance of Him, He also directs them to serve one another. With towels and basins—the tools of servants—Jesus’ disciples “are commissioned to make contact with the soiled, sometimes unattractive dimensions of humanity and to carry out our ministry with loving attention.”<sup>74</sup> He tells them to bend down, tend to, and make clean the dirty, repulsive areas of human life—the feet—just as He did. John Paul II explains why the author of John’s Gospel includes the washing of the feet as opposed to a formal Institution Narrative in his account of the Last Supper: “It is not by chance that the Gospel of John contains no account of the institution of the Eucharist, but instead relates the ‘washing of the feet’: by bending down to wash the feet of his disciples, Jesus explains the meaning of the Eucharist unequivocally.”<sup>75</sup> Reflecting on this humble action

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<sup>71</sup> Luke 22: 19. Cf. 1 Corinthians 11: 24-25.

<sup>72</sup>Cf. John 13: 1-17.

<sup>73</sup> John 13: 14-15.

<sup>74</sup> R. Kevin Seasoltz, “Justice and the Eucharist,” in *Living Bread, Saving Cup*, ed. R. Kevin Seasoltz (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1987), 320.

<sup>75</sup> *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 28.



of the Lord, one is reminded of how service is always at the heart of our Eucharistic celebrations because it is the center of the Last Supper. Thus, the Gospel of John beautifully illustrates how worship and justice—how the Eucharist and care for neighbor—are intimately related.

In addition to John’s account of the Last Supper, the New Testament includes another essential text that clearly articulates the unity of worship and justice: St. Paul’s first Letter to the Corinthians. Paul strongly asserts that authentic celebrations of the Lord’s Supper can never be devoid from a concrete concern for social justice.<sup>76</sup> Writing from Ephesus in late 56 or early 57 to the community he founded just a few years earlier,<sup>77</sup> Paul rebukes the Corinthians because abuses and division were corrupting their memorial of the Lord’s Supper. The Corinthians mistakenly thought that Christianity was some type of spiritual knowledge and that the body and the things associated with the body did not matter. As a result, the Corinthians neglected the physical needs of some in the community and “could celebrate the eucharist while being oblivious to the social ramifications of what they were doing.”<sup>78</sup> Social divisions and injustice are completely incompatible with the Lord’s Supper. For this reason, Paul exclaims: “When you meet together, it is not the Lord’s supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal, and one is hungry and another is drunk.”<sup>79</sup> The Corinthians celebrated the Sunday Eucharist in the context of a full meal, which lacked a common starting time. Since they did not have to spend their day working, the wealthy could come early and immediately begin to satisfy their hunger and thirst. Meanwhile, the poor, hungry and

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<sup>76</sup> Cf. 1 Corinthians 11: 17-34.

<sup>77</sup> Raymond Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 512.

<sup>78</sup> Seasoltz, “Justice and the Eucharist,” 322.

<sup>79</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:20-21.

exhausted from their labor, would arrive later.<sup>80</sup> Since the meal was self-prepared, the type of meal eaten by the rich and the poor was not equal in terms of either quality or quantity.<sup>81</sup> Having already had their fill before the poor arrived, the wealthy did not share their food with the poor. The wealthy and the poor also ate in separate areas; the wealthy ate in the comfortable, exclusive dining room and the poor were relegated to the courtyard. George T. Montague explains how the multiple dining areas diminished the intended festive unity of the Eucharist: “The meal had the appearance not of a banquet but of a series of picnicking circles or individual dinner groups as in today’s restaurants or cafeterias, separated, however, not by convenience but by class.”<sup>82</sup> The divisions between the rich and the poor could be easily discerned based on the physical position on each individual. These divisions were not just disrupting any meal, but the celebration of the Eucharist, a tradition instituted by the Lord Himself to effect union with Him and with one another.

Disgruntled over divisions infiltrating the Eucharist, Paul reminds the Corinthians of the true nature and purpose of the celebration and, in turn, their identity in relationship to one another. Raymond Brown explains the meaning of the Eucharist according to Paul’s vision: “The whole purpose of the sacred breaking of the bread is *koinonia*, not division of the community.”<sup>83</sup> *Koinonia* refers to participation in Christ’s body and blood, the close union with Him that ensues, and, therefore, communion with others united to Him.<sup>84</sup> Since the community’s actions at the Lord’s Supper must always foster *koinonia*,

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<sup>80</sup> Nathan D. Mitchell, “Paul’s Eucharistic Theology,” *Worship* 83 no. 3 (May 2009), 259.

<sup>81</sup> Peter Lampe, “The Eucharist: Identifying with Christ on the Cross,” *Interpretation* 49 no. 1 (January 1994), 39.

<sup>82</sup> George T. Montague, *Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture: First Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 191.

<sup>83</sup> Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 523.

<sup>84</sup> Montague, *First Corinthians*, 174.

Paul urges the Corinthians to eat all together or eat at home if one is hungry before the Eucharistic assembly.<sup>85</sup> In the Eucharist, unity in Christ is made visible and strengthened. Paul asserts, “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.”<sup>86</sup> The oneness brought about by participation in the Eucharist is an actual reality, not just some lofty idea existing only in theory. Union with Christ, and, thereby, union with one another is at the heart of the Christian’s identity. Therefore, it is crucial that no part of the celebration of the Lord’s Supper impede this unity.

An important aspect of Paul’s Eucharistic theology is that the manner of celebrating the Lord’s Supper determines judgment. Paul tells the Corinthians of the severe consequences for an improper celebration of the Eucharist: “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and the blood of the Lord.”<sup>87</sup> The one who participates in the memorial of the Lord’s Supper unworthily is the one who fails to recognize the Lord’s presence in others—in all the members of the assembled community. Such sacrilege induces God’s judgment.<sup>88</sup> Christ is present at the Eucharist as savior, but He also acts as judge: “The Lord who is present at the Eucharist with his saving power is at the same time a judging Lord...not the Lord but the human being and human behavior are seized and impounded in the Eucharist and are thus under Christ’s reign—and judgment.”<sup>89</sup> Celebrating the Lord’s Supper unworthily does not only lead to judgment at the Parousia, but also to judgment in the here-and-now; many of the Corinthians have become sick and

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<sup>85</sup> Cf. I Corinthians 11:33-34.

<sup>86</sup> I Corinthians 10:17.

<sup>87</sup> I Corinthians 11: 27.

<sup>88</sup> Montague, *First Corinthians*, 198.

<sup>89</sup> Lampe, “The Eucharist: Identifying with Christ on the Cross,” 46.

are dying.<sup>90</sup> In order to partake worthily in the Lord's Supper and thereby avoid severe judgment and death, Paul urges each person to "examine himself" and "discern the body" before eating the bread and drinking the cup.<sup>91</sup> The "body" has a double meaning in this context, as it refers both to the Eucharistic body of Christ and the ecclesial body of Christ. The presence of the Risen Lord's body in the sacrament cannot be separated from His presence in the assembled community.<sup>92</sup> Paul is reminding the Corinthians that the extent of their belief in Christ's presence in the sacrament is intimately related to their belief in Christ's presence in the church community; belief in one form of presence alone is not sufficient or valid, as the former must necessarily inform the latter. One's identity as a Christian is not complete without belief in both—without fully discerning the body. Overall, Paul's rebuke of the Corinthians makes it clear that Christian worship can never be individualistic or purely spiritual. Christian worship always involves looking to and concretely attending to the bodily needs of others in the community, for Christ's presence dwells in them too, not solely in the bread and wine.

Other texts in the New Testament also highlight the relationship between worship and justice. In the Acts of the Apostles, for example, the breaking of the bread is connected with fellowship and sharing possessions in community with those in need.<sup>93</sup> In the Letter of James, it is clear that Christianity can never be reduced to a mere spirituality. Rather, concrete acts of service—works of social justice—must always accompany faith in Christ and are the essence of religion. As Raymond Brown notes,

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<sup>90</sup> Cf. 1 Corinthians 11:30. William T. Cavanaugh calls attention to a valid, yet alarming reality of partaking in the Eucharist unworthily: "Paul is not speaking metaphorically; *the Eucharist can kill you.*" William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), 236.

<sup>91</sup> 1 Corinthians 11: 28-29.

<sup>92</sup> Montague, *First Corinthians*, 200.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Acts of the Apostles 2: 42-47.

“There is nothing theoretical about the religion advocated in Jas 1:27: a religion manifested in taking care of needy widows and orphans and keeping oneself undefiled by the world.”<sup>94</sup> Faith in Christ affects every area of the believer’s life and determines the way one lives daily. It shapes the way one views others, interacts with them, and cares for their needs, most especially for the needs of the poor and suffering. Although the early Christians, such as those at Corinth, sometimes struggled to remember this, the early Church had a keen awareness that worship and justice go together—that the Eucharist and service of others are intimately united. In both the Eucharistic meal and in the care of the community, the presence of the Risen Lord was intimately encountered.

As a whole, the early Church had a profound understanding of how liturgy truly involved partaking in the Eucharistic meal and living a life of justice. Daily life was understood to be an extension of the liturgy. In his article, “Liturgy and Justice,” James Dallen summarizes the early Church’s perspective, a perspective marked by remarkable simplicity and insightfulness: “How can those who share the bread of life in a holy meal deny food to the hungry?”<sup>95</sup> Being nourished in one demanded that one nourish one another, especially the poor. Several Church Fathers discussed the relationship between the Eucharist and social justice in their writings.<sup>96</sup> In his *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* around 110 AD, Ignatius of Antioch argues that those who show no concern for the suffering are the same heretics who do not believe in the true presence of Christ in the Eucharist:

They have no regard for love; no care for the widow, or the orphan, or the

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<sup>94</sup> Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 729-730.

<sup>95</sup> James Dallen, “Liturgy and Justice,” *Worship* 65, no. 4 (July 1, 1991): 299.

<sup>96</sup> In chapter four, I will incorporate the thought of Augustine of Hippo to demonstrate how partaking in the Eucharist makes one like Christ. I will not be presenting this here, as it deviates from the chapter’s intended purpose: establishing the foundations of the close relationship between the Eucharist and social justice.

oppressed; of the bond, or of the free; of the hungry, or of the thirsty. They abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer, because they confess not the Eucharist to be the flesh of our Saviour Jesus Christ.<sup>97</sup>

Ignatius seems to be alluding to how the eyes of faith require one to see what is not obvious: the real presence of Christ in both the poor person and in the simple bread and wine. If one does not discern one form of presence, one will not recognize the other.

In his *First Apology*, written to the Roman Emperor Antoninus Pius and dated around 152, Justin Martyr describes the celebration of the Eucharist. After the reception of the consecrated bread and wine, “those who prosper, and who so wish, contribute... as much as [they] choose to. What is collected is deposited with the president, and he takes care of orphans and widows.”<sup>98</sup> An offering was taken up among those assembled at the Sunday Eucharist for the poor in the community. For Justin, the essential aspects of the Church’s communion are all connected: “prayers, eucharistic Communion, sharing, organized help for the needy.”<sup>99</sup> Concrete charity for the needy in the community flows from partaking in the Eucharist, as all are closely united to one another in the ecclesial body precisely as a result of the Eucharistic sharing. Here, Justin provides a very practical example of how liturgical worship and working for social justice do not have to be two separate realms of life and can be united in the celebration of the Eucharist itself.

In his passionate homilies, John Chrysostom, Antioch’s prized preacher of the late fourth century, made sure that his congregations were aware of the connection between

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<sup>97</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans*, 6-7 in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1, trans., Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Revised for *New Advent* by Kevin Knight).

<sup>98</sup> Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 65.67 in Marcel Metzger, *History of the Liturgy: The Major Stages* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1997), 40.

<sup>99</sup> Marcel Metzger, *History of the Liturgy: The Major Stages* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1997), 40-41.

the Eucharist and social justice.<sup>100</sup> Providing an analysis and application of the Gospel of Matthew, Chrysostom exhorts all who approach the Eucharistic table to denounce greed. He finds it utterly abominable that liturgical vessels and garments made of the finest jewels and fabrics are prioritized over care for the poor. He proclaims that “the church is not a gold foundry nor a workshop for silver”<sup>101</sup> and must focus on the care of souls. God desires the purest and finest souls above all, not the most luxurious vessels. In his letter to Paulinus, dated around 395 AD, Jerome makes an argument quite similar to that of his contemporary. He writes, “The true temple of Christ is the believer's soul; adorn this, clothe it, offer gifts to it, welcome Christ in it. What use are walls blazing with jewels when Christ in His poor (Mt 25:40) is in danger of perishing from hunger?”<sup>102</sup> Both Jerome and Chrysostom prioritize the beauty of the soul and the care of Christ in the poor person over extravagance. Chrysostom, especially, urges his congregation to recognize the presence of God in both the consecrated bread and wine and in the poor on account of Christ’s words:

Do you want to honor Christ’s body? Then do not scorn him in his nakedness, nor honor him here in the church with silken garments while neglecting him outside where he is cold and naked. For he who said: This is my body, and made it so by his words, also said: ‘*You saw me hungry and did not feed me, and inasmuch as you did not do it for one of these, the least of my brothers, you did not do it for me*’ (Mt 25:34ff).<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> A quote regarding the relationship between the Eucharist and social justice frequently cited in blog posts and non-scholarly articles is often attributed to Chrysostom: “If you fail to recognize Christ in the beggar outside the church, you will not find him in the chalice.” I first came across the quote on Twitter, but have been unable to locate its precise source. For this reason, I am only making a note of it here. The quote seems to imply that it is the ability to recognize Christ in the poor that allows one to recognize His presence in the consecrated bread and wine, not vice versa.

<sup>101</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homily 50 On Matthew*, 4, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 10, trans. George Prevest. (Revised for *New Advent* by Kevin Knight).

<sup>102</sup> Jerome, *Letter 58 To Paulinus*, 7, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, Vol. 6, trans. W.H. Fremantle, G. Lewis and W.G. Martley. (Revised for *New Advent* by Kevin Knight).

<sup>103</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homily 50 On Matthew*, 4. Modern translation taken from *The Crossroads Initiative* [https://www.crossroadsinitiative.com/library\\_article/977/Don\\_t\\_Adorn\\_the\\_Church\\_but\\_Ignore\\_the\\_Poor\\_John\\_Chrysostom.html](https://www.crossroadsinitiative.com/library_article/977/Don_t_Adorn_the_Church_but_Ignore_the_Poor_John_Chrysostom.html).

Christ identifies Himself with the broken bread, as well as with the hungry, unclothed person on the street. The Eucharistic body and the body of the poor person are both the body of Christ Himself. Therefore, Christ's presence in the Eucharist is intrinsically connected to His presence in the poor and vulnerable.

In the early Church, an important dimension of the Eucharist-justice connection concerned the need for reconciliation and peace between individuals.<sup>104</sup> Chrysostom urges his congregation to imitate Christ, who became incarnate in order to reconcile fallen man to God and to make him a sharer in His divine life, by forgiving one another and striving for peace:

You, according to human capacity, must do what the Onlybegotten Son of God has done, be an agent of peace, for yourself and for others. For this reason, at the very time of sacrifice He recalls to us no other commandment than that of reconciliation with one's brother, showing that is the greatest of all.<sup>105</sup>

Forgiving others' transgressions and being forgiven for transgressions committed is a prerequisite for worthily participating in the Eucharist. Chrysostom was not announcing an unheard of concept to his congregation, but one that was rooted in the Gospel<sup>106</sup> and central to the daily life of very early Christian communities. *The Didache (The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles)*, a Syrian church order with final redactions dating back to the second century but containing earlier writings, provides instructions about how the Eucharistic liturgy should be celebrated.<sup>107</sup> In order for the Eucharistic sacrifice to remain undefiled, all the members of the community must be reconciled to one another and all disputes settled:

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<sup>104</sup> I will discuss this theme in more detail in chapter three.

<sup>105</sup> John Chrysostom, *Sermon on the Betrayal of Judas*, 6, in Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 239.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. Matthew 5: 23-24.

<sup>107</sup> Metzger, *History of the Liturgy*, 17.



Assemble on the Lord's Day, and break bread and offer the Eucharist; but first make confession of your faults, so that your sacrifice may be a pure one. Anyone who has a difference with his fellow is not to take part with you until they have been reconciled, so as to avoid any profanation of your sacrifice.<sup>108</sup>

As is the case today, the celebration of the Eucharist in the early Church included an exchange or kiss of peace, an outward sign of forgiveness and reconciliation. Until the fifth century, the kiss of peace took place after the general intercessions and before the preparation of the gifts.<sup>109</sup> The *Didascalia Apostolorum* (*The Catholic Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*), an Antiochene church order dating back to the first half of the third century, presents the kiss of peace as a final opportunity for reconciliation between neighbors. During this time, the deacon would ask the congregation if anyone was still in need of forgiving or being forgiven by another; this took place to ensure that all people joining in the offering of the Eucharist were reconciled.<sup>110</sup> The early Church recognized that the unity of the Body of Christ is possible and made visible only when members of the community are reconciled to one another. Since a true and pure celebration of the Eucharist demands the unity of the ecclesial body, it also requires authentic forgiveness, reconciliation, and peace among all.

Another aspect of the early Church's understanding of the relationship between the Eucharist and social justice involves the eschatological dimension—a topic which will be returned to later. With a greater awareness of the Parousia, the early Christians experienced the tension between living in the present reality and awaiting the future reality—between building the Kingdom of God in the here-and-now and anticipating its full realization. They understood that both liturgical worship and just living are directed

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<sup>108</sup> *The Didache*, 14, in Cavanaugh, *Torture and the Eucharist*, 238.

<sup>109</sup> Metzger, *History of the Liturgy*, 40.

<sup>110</sup> Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, 238.

towards establishing the Kingdom of God on earth and yet anticipate God's Reign fully celebrated at the Wedding Feast of the Lamb in heaven. Since liturgy and social justice share this same goal, they cannot be separated from one another.<sup>111</sup> In the early Church, the Eucharist was the sustenance of hope as the foretaste of the blessings to come entering into the present reality. Theodore of Mopsuestia, a late 4<sup>th</sup> century bishop, recognized that the Eucharistic sharing of the present-future reality must affect daily living: "we must order our life according to the realities of that other world."<sup>112</sup> This entails an ordering of our actions, so that they are directed towards the perfect justice that reigns in heaven. Our actions, therefore, make this future justice a present reality, as does the Eucharist.

In this chapter, I have presented several examples of the close relationship between worship and social justice found in Scripture and the early Church. Overall, these examples illustrate that the only worship desired by and acceptable to the God of Jesus Christ is that which is accompanied by actual care for neighbor. One's sacrifice to God is rendered futile if one does not make sacrifices for the poor as well. Worship, as is made clear throughout the Judeo-Christian tradition, is never simply an exclusive event involving only God and the individual worshiper. Rather, worship, most especially the celebration of the Eucharist, always includes others and places strong demands on human relationships: they should be modeled after and reflect the justice, mercy, love, and self-sacrifice of God Himself. In the next chapter, I will present specific ways that the celebration of the Eucharist sheds light on and calls for this type of social relationship.

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<sup>111</sup> Dempsey, "Celebrating Justice: The Sacramental Connection," 55.

<sup>112</sup> Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Catechetical Homilies* XVI, 33, in Geoffrey Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 48.

### CHAPTER THREE: Examining Specific Eucharist-Justice Connections

Having established the state of the present question and the foundations of the close relationship between worship and justice in the preceding chapters, it is now possible to examine the celebration of the Eucharist in light of specific social justice themes and principles. The Eucharistic liturgy is replete with symbols and references to the necessary work of social justice, although these are often quickly passed over or left unnoticed altogether. It is of the utmost importance, however, that all the faithful become aware of them in order to appreciate the relevance of their Sunday worship. As a result of this knowledge on the part of all the Church's members, the renewing and transformative power of the liturgy will not be restricted to the church's four walls but will permeate all of society. Not a careless arrangement of words and gestures, the liturgy serves as the voice of the Church—Christ speaking through her lips—as she addresses both God and herself. The celebration of the Eucharist speaks and, certainly, it speaks about justice: it expresses the unity and inclusivity of the Body of Christ, the basic need for food, the reign of God's Kingdom, the conditions of reconciliation and peace, and the meaning of sacrifice. In this chapter, I will explain what the Mass says about each of these themes in order to demonstrate concrete examples of the close relationship between the Eucharist and social justice.

In order to better articulate these themes—particularly the Body of Christ and sacrifice—the important contributions of Virgil Michel, Hans A. Reinhold, and Reynold Hillenbrand, three leading figures of the Liturgical Movement in the United States, need to be acknowledged. As the history of the liturgy developed beyond the Patristic period, the close relationship between the Eucharist and social justice seems largely to have been

ignored until the emergence of the Liturgical Movement. Though the work of liturgical renewal can be traced back to French and German Benedictine monasteries in the 1830s, the Liturgical Movement proper took form in the early decades of the twentieth century. Virgil Michel, the Liturgical Movement leader on whom the present research will concentrate, understood the liturgy as the key to transforming a culture that was growing ever more individualistic and unjust in the midst of the Great Depression era. The liturgy is the means by which one learns what it means to live as a Christian in society. Partaking in the Eucharistic liturgy “teaches the value of material things, fosters participation in communal activity, promotes a spirit of solidarity among persons, and encourages a disposition toward selflessness in response to the legitimate needs of the community.”<sup>113</sup> Building upon the thought of both Pius X and Pius XI, Michel argued that active participation in the liturgy leads to a renewed Christian spirit, which is essential for the renewal of society. One of Michel’s most renowned insights takes the form of a syllogism: “Pius X tells us that liturgy is the indispensable source of the true Christian spirit; Pius XI says that the true Christian spirit is indispensable for social regeneration. Hence the conclusion: The liturgy is the indispensable basis of Christian social regeneration.”<sup>114</sup> Having been first formed and taught by the liturgy, the Christian is able to more effectively contribute to the creation of a just society.

At the heart of Michel’s understanding of the relationship between the liturgy and society is the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ, which makes claims about the intimate union of the Church’s members with one another and with Christ—and here, we

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<sup>113</sup> Kenneth R. Himes, “Eucharist and Justice: Assessing the Legacy of Virgil Michel,” *Worship* 62, no. 3 (May 1, 1988): 210.

<sup>114</sup> Virgil Michel, “The Liturgy the Basis of Social Regeneration,” *Orate Fratres* 9, no. 12 (November 2, 1935): 545.

begin examining the first of the Eucharist-justice connections to be presented in this chapter. Through Baptism, one becomes a member of the Mystical Body and is joined to the other members of the Body and to the Head in permanent fellowship. As a result of this union, all the merits of Christ and the members of His Body are shared in common and this Michel describes as “the highest type of Christian solidarity.”<sup>115</sup> Solidarity, an important social justice concept that was introduced in chapter one and will be discussed in detail later in this chapter, refers to the unity of the human family. Michel echoes Pius XI’s conviction that authentic social renewal only results when the unity of the human family is recognized and when “the mutual bond of minds and hearts” is at the core of reform:

And so, then only will true cooperation be possible for a single common good when the constituent parts of society deeply feel themselves members of one great family and children of the same Heavenly Father; nay, that they are one body in Christ, ‘but severally members one of another,’ so that ‘if one member suffers anything, all the members suffer with it.’<sup>116</sup>

This bond of fellowship—solidarity—is central to the Christian spirit, which finds its source in the Eucharistic liturgy. In the celebration of the Eucharist, the Mystical Body of Christ becomes most visible and most fully experienced.<sup>117</sup> For Michel, the Mystical Body of Christ is not a mere abstract idea, but rather a concrete reality that the liturgy puts into full practice. One way this occurs is through the reception of Holy Communion, which is never private and exclusive but a thoroughly communal event.<sup>118</sup> One of the most important goals of liturgical reform was to more clearly express the reality of the

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 541.

<sup>116</sup> *Quadragesimo Anno*, 137. Cf. Michel, “The Liturgy the Basis of Social Regeneration,” 544.

<sup>117</sup> Himes, “Eucharist and Justice: Assessing the Legacy of Virgil Michel,” 203.

<sup>118</sup> Michel, “The Liturgy the Basis of Social Regeneration,” 542.

Church as the living Mystical Body of Christ.<sup>119</sup> Michel understood the supernatural society of the Mystical Body to be the model of natural human society.<sup>120</sup> All members of society are connected to each other and should have equal opportunity to share in material goods, just as all the members of the Mystical Body are united and have the same access to spiritual goods.<sup>121</sup> All are called to actively participate in the community and work towards its common good, and the needs of the weakest members are the concern and the responsibility of all. The solidarity of the Mystical Body that one experiences in the liturgy thus should be imitated by and reflected in the society at large. The role of the members of the Mystical Body, who themselves have been formed by the liturgy and have learned what it means to be in union with one another, is undeniably essential: it is they who show forth this example of true human fellowship to the world. Even more importantly for Michel, social regeneration is impossible without the liturgy as its basis.

In addition to Virgil Michel, two other liturgical reformers in the United States who valued the place of the liturgy in the work of social justice are worth briefly noting. First, Hans A. Reinhold, a German priest who moved to the United States out of fear of the Nazi regime, believed that participation in the liturgy should challenge and incite the members of the Church to work for social change. As the Mystical Body, the Church continues to make Christ present in the world and serves as the continuation of the Incarnation. For this reason, the body, in addition to the spirit, is the concern of the

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<sup>119</sup> Himes, "Eucharist and Justice: Assessing the Legacy of Virgil Michel," 203.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>121</sup> Virgil Michel, "Natural and Supernatural Society: V. The Christian Possession of Goods," *Orate Fratres* 10, no. 10 (September 5, 1936): 436.

liturgy.<sup>122</sup> The liturgy is not an escape from the injustices of the world, but demands that those who celebrate liturgy concretely support the work of justice. Secondly, Reynold Hillenbrand, a seminary rector and a parish priest in the Chicago area, followed in the footsteps of Virgil Michel and promoted the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ.<sup>123</sup> He called for members of the Church to share the saving effects of Christ's sacrifice with the poor and discriminated against, since Christ's death was for them too.<sup>124</sup> Celebrating Christ's sacrifice in the Mass requires that one live sacrificially—a theme that will be addressed directly at the end of the chapter. All three of these key liturgical and social reformers recognized how important active participation in the liturgy is for the transformation of society. To be the Church in the world means to live in union with others, to lay down one's life, and to welcome all into the unity of the Mystical Body of Christ—and this is precisely what the liturgy teaches.

### 3.1 The Unity and Inclusivity of the Body of Christ

The theme of the unity of the Body of Christ is rooted in Scripture and has already been introduced in the previous chapter. St. Paul asks, “Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread.”<sup>125</sup> An organic unity exists between the Head and the Body and among the members of the Body themselves.<sup>126</sup> In this Body, each person has a particular and necessary role, but depends on the rest of the Body for his or her wellbeing and very

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<sup>122</sup> Hans A. Reinhold, “A Social Leaven?,” *Orationes Fratres* 25, no. 11-12 (October 1, 1951): 518.

<sup>123</sup> Keith F. Pecklers, *The Unread Vision: The Liturgical Movement in the United States of America, 1926-1955* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 144.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>125</sup> 1 Corinthians 10: 16-17.

<sup>126</sup> Seasoltz, “Justice and the Eucharist,” 321.

life.<sup>127</sup> On account of the indissoluble unity of the Body, all things—joys and sufferings alike—are shared in common:

But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.<sup>128</sup>

What one part of the Body experiences, the rest of the Body experiences as well. There is nothing that only affects one member, as all are intimately connected and exist as one, living Body. Elaborating on the unity of the Body of Christ, William Cavanaugh links Paul's understanding with the Judgment of the Nations in Matthew 25.<sup>129</sup> Since Christ, the Head of the Body, identified Himself with the poor, all the other members of the Body are identified with poor as well:

The pain of the hungry person is the pain of Christ, and it is thus also the pain of anyone who is a member of the body of Christ. If we are identified with Christ, who identifies himself with the suffering of all, then what is called for is more than just charity. The very distinction between what is mine and what is yours breaks down in the body of Christ.<sup>130</sup>

No one is truly other in the unity of the Church, as all belong to one and the same Body. The cry of the poor is the cry of the rich; the food of the satisfied is the food that belongs to the hungry as well; the popular celebrity feels the rejection of the outcast.

The unity of the Body of Christ effected by both Baptism and the Eucharist clearly expresses and demands one of the primary principles of Catholic social teaching: solidarity. Solidarity refers to the interdependence of humankind and how all are obligated to care for one another: “It is a firm and preserving determination to commit

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<sup>127</sup> Cf. 1 Corinthians 12: 17-24.

<sup>128</sup> 1 Corinthians 12: 24-26.

<sup>129</sup> William T. Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 96. Cf. Matthew 25: 31-26.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.



oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.”<sup>131</sup> Gathered as one assembly lifting one voice of praise to the Father, the Church present at each celebration of the Eucharist remembers and celebrates solidarity and the unity of the human family. In *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, Pope John Paul II describes the Eucharist as a “project of solidarity for all of humanity.”<sup>132</sup> Thus, the communion of the Church enjoyed in the Eucharist is not enough in itself, but it must extend to all peoples. By strengthening the unity of the Church, the Eucharist fosters the unity of the entire world. Furthermore, the Eucharist teaches one to live in solidarity with the poor, as the One received in the Eucharist is the One who lived in solidarity with humanity’s poverty and is truly encountered in the least of these.<sup>133</sup> Pope Benedict XVI powerfully affirms this principle: “The Eucharist is a school of charity and solidarity. The one who is nourished on the Bread of Christ cannot remain indifferent before the one who, even in our day, is deprived of daily bread.”<sup>134</sup> Admittedly, it is easy for one to claim that he or she stands in solidarity with the poor while, in reality, he or she does not associate with them and may even ignore them on the street. Cavanaugh identifies the temptation “to spiritualize all this talk of union, to make our connection to the hungry a mystical act of imaginative sympathy.”<sup>135</sup> As the greatest expression of the unity of the Body of Christ and of the universal family, the Eucharist stands in firm opposition to all forms of false solidarity. It always calls those who partake to examine whether they truly live in solidarity with society’s most vulnerable, to

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<sup>131</sup> *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 38.

<sup>132</sup> *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 27.

<sup>133</sup> Cf. Matthew 25: 40, 45.

<sup>134</sup> Benedict XVI, *The Eucharist: Spiritual Thoughts Series* (Washington D.C.: USCCB Publishing, 2009), 99.

<sup>135</sup> Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed*, 97.

“discern the body,” and to adjust their lives accordingly.

In addition to the unity of the Body of Christ, the inclusivity of this Body is clarified in the Eucharistic liturgy. The Eucharist is intended to be an inclusive celebration to which all are invited, welcomed, and belong.<sup>136</sup> Christ did not die for a select group of people, but for all. At the Last Supper, Christ instituted a new community without distinction or division when He identified the wine with His blood, the blood of the New Covenant that is offered to all peoples.<sup>137</sup> The Last Supper symbolically represents all meals that Christ shared with the poor, the marginalized, and sinners in the Gospel.<sup>138</sup> All were welcomed to sit at table with Him. Table fellowship can be understood as a metaphor for justice since all people—none of whom are worthy—share the same invitation to be seated at the banquet of the Lord.<sup>139</sup> Following Christ’s example, those who now partake in the Lord’s Supper must share their bread and their tables with the poor and the outcast. They must engage in “extending the table” to those with whom Christ ate, for His “table-activity brought down and removed the walls of exclusion that limited attendance to the rich and the good.”<sup>140</sup> The Eucharistic celebration takes place around a common table where diverse people gather together in communion with one another and with God. At this table, the dignity of each human person, made in the image and likeness of God and redeemed by the blood of Christ, is called to mind, as

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<sup>136</sup> Sensitive pastoral questions regarding admittance to Holy Communion certainly remain—questions concerning intercommunion, the age of first reception, divorced and re-married Catholics, pro-choice politicians, etc. Should anyone be denied the Bread of Life? Would a good host or a loving mother not hospitably offer food to all the guests in her home? The Church must continue to prayerfully ponder and answer such questions in a way that does not detract from or obscure the true meaning of the sacrament but also supports the meal’s inclusive nature. These concerns go beyond the bounds of the present research, but deserve acknowledgment.

<sup>137</sup> Seasoltz, “Justice and the Eucharist,” 316-317.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 317.

<sup>139</sup> David Andrews, “The Lord’s Table, the World’s Hunger: Liturgy, Justice, and Rural Life,” in *Liturgy and Justice: To Worship God in Spirit and Truth*, ed. Anne Y. Koester (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2002), 67-69.

<sup>140</sup> Scott, *The Eucharist and Social Justice*, 8.

the Eucharist makes present Christ's sacrifice of love for all humanity.

The unity and the inclusivity of the Body of Christ relate to the universal nature of the Church. The whole Church is present at each Eucharistic celebration of a specific community, as every Eucharist is the action of the entire Church.<sup>141</sup> Affirming the public nature of the Church's liturgies, the Council Fathers insist that they are "celebrations of the Church, which is the 'sacrament of unity,' namely, the holy people united and ordered under their bishops. Therefore liturgical services pertain to the whole body of the Church; they manifest it and have effects upon it."<sup>142</sup> On account of the unity of the Body, Eucharistic celebrations never occur in isolation. In the Eucharist, the wealthy parish in the suburbs of Fairfield County, Connecticut is joined to the poorest rural parish in Haiti and vice versa. The Eucharistic celebration reaches beyond the particular community of believers present, as Margaret Scott elaborates:

But each eucharistic community contains the whole Body of Christ, the whole Church. The local contains the universal. The community gathered for the Eucharist extends to embrace the pilgrim people of God, in all times and places. Wherever the Eucharist is celebrated, the whole Church is present—and the whole world, too.<sup>143</sup>

Thus, the Eucharist is always celebrated in a global context. Although the universal nature of the Eucharist is intrinsically present, the importance of the local community remains nevertheless. Cavanaugh asserts that belonging to a particular worshipping community is necessary for appreciating the universal Church:

'Catholic' means a gathering rather than a spreading out, a unification of the many through attachment to the local eucharistic community. One becomes more

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<sup>141</sup> The presence of the Church in Heaven at each Eucharist is worth noting. The saints, who were martyred for the sake of justice, who poured themselves out in service of the least of these, and who embraced Christ's call to wash others' feet, worship with the Church on earth. They are extraordinary models of service and can inspire the pilgrim Church to live justly. Furthermore, they serve as great intercessors for the Church's social justice efforts.

<sup>142</sup> *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 26.

<sup>143</sup> Scott, *The Eucharist and Social Justice*, 7.

catholic, more universal the more one is tied to a particular community of Christians gathered around the altar.<sup>144</sup>

It is in these local celebrations of the Eucharist that one primarily encounters Christ, the Head of the Body, and learns what it means to belong to the Church community. One, then, becomes more able to recognize that those of “every tribe and tongue and people and nation”<sup>145</sup> partake in the Eucharist and are present at his or her own local Eucharistic celebration. The Church is diverse; innumerable ethnicities, languages, and cultures are represented in her. Although progress is still to be made in the work of inculturation, the Church values the cultural traditions of various peoples and seeks to incorporate them into the liturgy when possible.<sup>146</sup> Overall, the Eucharist calls the Church to daily live according to the reality that is experienced in every Eucharistic celebration: the interconnectedness of the universal Body of Christ—the one People of God consisting of so many diverse persons.

### 3.2 Christ as Food Consumed

The next Eucharist-justice theme to be examined is the necessity of and right to food. Since Jesus identified bread and wine with His body and blood at the Last Supper, bread and wine continue to be used as the two central signs of the Eucharistic meal—the matter of the sacrament. Bread and wine are richly symbolic and highlight the Eucharist’s connection to justice, as they call to mind man’s fundamental need for food and drink and help satisfy his hunger and thirst. Hunger is a shared experience of all humanity: “To be human is to be hungry.”<sup>147</sup> Undoubtedly, some people throughout the globe have more

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<sup>144</sup> Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed*, 85.

<sup>145</sup> Revelation 5:9.

<sup>146</sup> Cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 37-40.

<sup>147</sup> Monkia K. Hellwig, *The Eucharist and the Hunger of the World*, Second Edition, Revised and Expanded (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1992), 3.

intense, prolonged periods of hunger and thirst than others. The use of bread and wine at Mass helps the Church to recall both the common, unifying experience of hunger and the problems of extreme poverty and global hunger. The elements of bread and wine also affirm the goodness of creation.<sup>148</sup> The Eucharist proclaims that all people have the right to enjoy the benefits and fruits of creation. Staple food and drink in the Mediterranean Basin during Jesus' time, bread and wine both contain natural elements and are artificial products.<sup>149</sup> This truth is reflected at Mass during the presentation and preparation of the gifts; the bread is called "the fruit of the earth and work of human hands" and the wine is called "the fruit of the vine and work of human hands." Veiled behind the bread and wine are the people who worked to produce it and their lives are intensely entwined with the Eucharistic offering: "Bread and wine tell us the tale of human labor, a narrative made up of effort and struggle, and of toil, tears, and sweat. This toil and sweat are integrated into the Eucharist and transformed by the action of the Spirit of God to become the bread of life."<sup>150</sup> In the Eucharist, the seemingly unending meaningless work of human beings becomes the most meaningful reality of all. Because Christ gives Himself as food and drink to be consumed, it is possible to say that abundance will prevail over starvation, hope over suffering, and life over death. Bread and wine are both symbolic of the triumph of life. As the grain of wheat is planted in the ground, bread "implies in the first place the image of death and resurrection in the bosom of the earth."<sup>151</sup> Retaining the color of blood—the color of life—wine is associated with vitality.<sup>152</sup> The use of bread and wine,

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<sup>148</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1333.

<sup>149</sup> Phillippe Rouillard, "From Human Meal to Christian Eucharist," in *Living Bread, Saving Cup*, ed. R. Kevin Seasoltz (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1987), 128-129.

<sup>150</sup> Scott, *The Eucharist and Social Justice*, 52.

<sup>151</sup> Rouillard, "From Human Meal to Christian Eucharist," 129.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

therefore, announce the life that Christ offers to all people: the rich and poor, the filled and hungry, the employed and unemployed alike.

The Eucharist is a meal at which Christ shares Himself as “the Bread of Life.”<sup>153</sup> He gives Himself as food and drink to be eaten and consumed. While earthly food provides only temporary sustenance, Jesus in the Eucharist gives lasting, eternal nourishment. Phillipe Rouillard notes that nourishment, the preservation of one’s own life, results from the death of another and applies this notion to the Eucharist: “I nourish myself with the life of the wheat and grapes sacrificed for me but also with the body of Christ given for me and with his blood shed for me.”<sup>154</sup> Through His total self-emptying on the cross, Christ made the abundance of life available to all people. This kenosis is remembered and made present at each Eucharistic liturgy: “Each celebration of the Eucharist makes sacramentally present the gift that the crucified Lord made of his life, for us and for the whole world.”<sup>155</sup> Benedict XVI is apt to highlight the nature of Christ’s sacrifice as a gift. The cross and its re-presentation in the Eucharist are pure gifts, “not something we earn or deserve. God’s gift comes from God’s sheer initiative, from God’s love.”<sup>156</sup> The Eucharist invites all to come and receive the gift that God offers. It invites all to receive their fill, but the possibility of being satisfied only comes as a result of the cross.<sup>157</sup> The great paradox is that all can be fed and become eternally wealthy because of the poverty of the cross. In the Eucharist, the Church participates in the poverty of her Head, as she offers herself in union with His great sacrifice. This participation, which

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<sup>153</sup> John 6:48.

<sup>154</sup> Rouillard, “From Human Meal to Christian Eucharist,” 128.

<sup>155</sup> *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 88. Cf. John 6:51.

<sup>156</sup> R. Kevin Seasoltz, *God’s Gift Giving: In Christ and Through the Spirit* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 36.

<sup>157</sup> Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed*, 95.

culminates in receiving the Bread of Life, “spurs us to be mindful of the situation of extreme poverty in which a great part of humanity still lives.”<sup>158</sup> Thus, the Eucharist criticizes instances of and structures that cause hunger, malnutrition, and injustice and challenges the one who eats it to help in the alleviation of these problems.

Just as Christ shares Himself as food to be consumed, the members of His Body are called to do likewise. Receiving the bread broken for the life of the world demands that one shares one’s material goods and his or her very self with others. Each member of the Body of Christ is to be “food for the world, to be broken, given away, and consumed.”<sup>159</sup> In other words, he or she is to become Eucharist. This demands sacrifice in imitation and remembrance of Christ for the good of others. Sacrifice—being broken—is a painful experience, but just as Christ willingly endured being broken in order to share Himself with those He loved, His followers must do the same.<sup>160</sup> Christ gives Himself as the gift of food in the Eucharist, so that all who receive Him will become a gift for others: “The eucharist is indeed the gift of God’s food and love for us, but it is given so we in turn might be food and love for one another.”<sup>161</sup> Among those in most need of this gift are certainly the poorest of the poor, who often experience the pain of loneliness and neglect in addition to material impoverishment. Thus, serving others and living justly in accordance with the Eucharist involves tending to the needs of the whole person. No one who partakes in the Eucharist is exempt from becoming nourishment for others—from laying one’s own life down so that others may have life. At this sacred meal, “Christ continues today to exhort his disciples to become personally

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<sup>158</sup> *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 90.

<sup>159</sup> Cavanaugh, *Torture and the Eucharist*, 232.

<sup>160</sup> Anscar J. Chupungco, *What, Then, is Liturgy?* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2010), 47.

<sup>161</sup> Seasoltz, *God’s Gift Giving: In Christ and Through the Spirit*, 242.

engaged: ‘you yourselves, give them something to eat’ (Mt 14:16). Each of us is truly called, together with Jesus, to be bread broken for the life of the world.”<sup>162</sup> One cannot both eat of the Eucharistic bread and have no concern for the poor and hungry; this is utterly contradictory. John Paul II asserts that the way we treat the most vulnerable determines the legitimacy of our participation in the Mass:

I think for example of the tragedy of hunger which plagues hundreds of millions of human beings, the diseases which afflict developing countries, the loneliness of the elderly, the hardships faced by the unemployed, the struggles of immigrants... We cannot delude ourselves: by our mutual love and, in particular, by our concern for those in need we will be recognized as true followers of Christ. This will be the criterion by which the authenticity of our Eucharistic celebrations is judged.<sup>163</sup>

The Holy Father’s insight is reminiscent of the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats in Matthew 25: our eternal state and the validity of our participation in the Eucharist are both judged by how we love and serve the least of these. If the Church desires a true Eucharist, she must recognize in herself the need to be food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, consolation for the sorrowful, and a gift to those who go without and she must act accordingly. It will not be easy, yet the Bread of Life, who she consumes in order to feed others, will sustain her.

### 3.3 Kingdom of God: Eschatology and Justice

Although hunger pervades earthly society, it has no place in the Kingdom of God. All are invited to the Heavenly Banquet at which all will be satisfied in abundance and not one will go hungry. This is in accordance with the justice of God. In the liturgy, God’s justice—which is nothing less than the reconciling death of Christ—is most fully

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<sup>162</sup> *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 88.

<sup>163</sup> *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 28.



made manifest.<sup>164</sup> The bounds of space and time collapse in the Eucharist, as both a past and a future event, namely Christ's sacrifice and the coming of God's Kingdom, are brought into and experienced in the present moment. Kevin Irwin identifies the eschatological nature of the Eucharist as the key to understanding the relationship between the Eucharist and social justice.<sup>165</sup> He notes that the Eucharist is both a promise of the future and at the same time a challenge to presently live in accordance with justice. He suggests that the "relationship of the Eucharist to social justice be neither jettisoned nor programmed."<sup>166</sup> In this way, the eschatological challenge of the Eucharist remains without becoming overly political. In the Eucharist, the future Wedding Feast of the Lamb, perpetually celebrated in the Kingdom, and the triumph of God's justice break into time. Thus, the Eucharist announces the reign of God's justice and that there is an end to the sufferings, sorrows, and injustices of this world, an end that has already arrived albeit incompletely.

Through social justice activities, the Kingdom of God that enters into time in the Eucharist takes root in society. Authentic social justice essentially puts God's justice into practice: "Social justice is not merely the action of changing structures but actualizing the reign of God through the changes one makes in this world."<sup>167</sup> The work of social justice, while never neglecting the needs of people in the here-and-now, can never have the present time as its terminal point. Rather, it must always first look towards future glory. In this way, eschatological hope can be brought into the present as consolation to an oft-

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<sup>164</sup> Stewart Swetland, "Ecclesia de Eucharistia - The Liturgy and Social Justice," in *Sancrosanctum Concilium and the Reform of the Liturgy*, ed. Kenneth D. Whitehead (Scranton, PA: University of Scranton Press), 158.

<sup>165</sup> Kevin W. Irwin, *Models of the Eucharist* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 2005), 214.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>167</sup> Dempsey, "Celebrating Justice: the Sacramental Connection," 59.

despairing world. William Cavanaugh explains the Eucharist's eschatological implication for social justice: "In the Eucharist, God breaks in and disrupts the tragic despair of human history with a message of hope and a demand for justice. The hungry cannot wait; the heavenly feast is now."<sup>168</sup> Here, Cavanaugh highlights the urgency of social justice action, resulting precisely on account of the Eucharist's eschatological nature. In his encyclical, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, John Paul II emphasizes a similar idea: "Certainly the Christian vision leads to the expectation of 'new heavens' and 'a new earth', but this increases, rather than lessens, our sense of responsibility for the world today."<sup>169</sup> Thus, the Eucharistic liturgy can never be regarded as a refuge—a sanctuary—from the problems of the world. Nor can the Christian claim exemption from the trying, gritty work of social justice because the Kingdom of God awaits. If one does, he or she actually risks being deprived of that hoped-for future.

The eschatological nature of the Eucharist includes the reality of judgment. As the proclamation of the Lord's death until He comes again in glory, the Eucharist "places communities and human enterprises under judgment."<sup>170</sup> Judgment, therefore, is not some future event limited to the Parousia. Rather, it occurs in the present time, as the Judge enters into time through each celebration of the Eucharist. Since the Church prays for Christ's immediate return in the liturgy, "the Christian must live as if the Judge is on His way."<sup>171</sup> Thus, the reality of judgment should necessarily shape how one treats the poor and vulnerable. It should prompt one to live with a more authentic concern for the poor and induce a greater sense of responsibility. Not only is the wellbeing of the poor at stake

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<sup>168</sup> Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed*, 98.

<sup>169</sup> *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 20.

<sup>170</sup> David N. Power, "Eucharistic Justice," *Theological Studies* 67 no. 4 (December 2006): 859.

<sup>171</sup> Cavanaugh, *Torture and the Eucharist*, 239.

but also one's own eternal welfare. In the Eucharist, judgment is upon us. Receiving the Eucharist without tending to the needs of others risks condemnation, as Paul makes clear in his first Letter to the Corinthians: "For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves."<sup>172</sup> The same criteria for judgment—recognition of Christ's presence in the poor and care for them—is found in the Gospel of Matthew: "'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."<sup>173</sup> The person who fails to recognize and serve Christ in the least of these is fit neither to enter the Kingdom nor to partake of His Body and Blood. The Eucharist announces the coming of the Judge, but this is not a reason to fear or despair. On the contrary, it is a reason to hope that this just Judge is supremely merciful. Just as the cross displays His mercy on sinners, so does the Eucharist. It makes present God's promise of reconciliation, "a promise already being fulfilled" because of Christ's sacrifice.<sup>174</sup> The Eucharist proclaims and ushers in the coming of the Kingdom: the home of the reconciled. Having encountered the reconciling power of Christ in the Eucharist, the members of the Church are called to share this message of reconciliation with a divided world.

### 3.4 Reconciliation and Peace

The Eucharist is always directed towards reconciliation and peace among peoples—an important requirement of social justice. The Eucharist is the supreme sacrament of our reconciliation, as it makes present Christ's sacrifice on the cross that won the forgiveness of sins. It calls to mind the need to be reconciled with both God and neighbor and how all

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<sup>172</sup> 1 Corinthians 11: 29.

<sup>173</sup> Matthew 25: 45-46.

<sup>174</sup> Cavanaugh, *Torture and the Eucharist*, 240.

are, on some level, partly responsible for the brokenness that permeates society.<sup>175</sup> Man is perpetually in need of being reconciled, as sin disrupts relationships. Throughout the Mass, the Church prays for God's mercy, the forgiveness of sins, and the restoration of right relationship with Him and others. The Penitential Act during the Introductory Rites is one example of this. As noted in chapter two, one must be reconciled with one's neighbor before offering God a sacrifice at the altar.<sup>176</sup> For a rightful celebration of the Eucharist, one's heart must be free from anger and division and receptive to forgiveness, as Pope Benedict XVI explains:

The Eucharist is the sacrament of communion between brothers and sisters who allow themselves to be reconciled in Christ, who made of Jews and pagans one people, tearing down the wall of hostility which divided them (cf. Eph 2:14). Only this constant impulse towards reconciliation enables us to partake worthily of the Body and Blood of Christ (cf. Mt 5:23-24).<sup>177</sup>

Justice demands forgiveness for past wrongs and the healing of relationships, so that all may act as true brothers and sisters of the one human family. The celebration of the Eucharist promotes communion with one another, which in turn leads to love, understanding, and forgiveness.<sup>178</sup> The Eucharist renews and restores social relationships.<sup>179</sup> What is broken is taken up into the sacrifice of Christ, offered to the Father, and made whole again. Unity and solidarity, not division and strife, regain their rightful place as fundamental elements of a proper relationship. In essence, relationships themselves become Eucharistic. At the Eucharistic table, we are fed by and receive the God who reconciled us to Himself. As a result, the Eucharist not only demands that we are reconciled with one another, but it also increases our ability to progress in that

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<sup>175</sup> Scott, *The Eucharist and Social Justice*, 21.

<sup>176</sup> Cf. Matthew 5:24.

<sup>177</sup> *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 89.

<sup>178</sup> *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 21.

<sup>179</sup> *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 89.

reconciliation: “Through the participation in the Lord’s Supper, where Christ offers in his own self-gift the gift of forgiveness, we might well enlarge our capacity to ask, give, and receive forgiveness.”<sup>180</sup> No social justice projects will succeed if they do not address the need for healing and reconciliation. The divisions between the rich and poor, employer and employee, and those among disputing communities can only be overcome by reconciling love. In the Eucharist, this Love is offered and received as strength and nourishment, so that all who partake may serve as “ambassadors of reconciliation”<sup>181</sup> and do their part in removing the divisions that contribute to social injustices.

Only when reconciliation occurs is peace between individuals and communities possible. The authentic restoration of relationships is the prerequisite of authentic peace. The Church’s prayer during the Breaking of the Bread, before the reception of Holy Communion, reflects this. She first asks Christ the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, to have mercy on her and then to grant her peace.<sup>182</sup> In union with the angelic choirs, the gathered Church asks God to bestow upon her His gift of peace—the peace that only exists perfectly in the future Kingdom and is nothing other than Himself—so that she may share it with others.<sup>183</sup> Always celebrated in a world marked by conflict and suffering, the Eucharist is a counter-cultural action, as it calls for and aids in the development of peace and the downfall of division. For the one who partakes in the Eucharist and receives the God of Peace, working for peace is not optional, but required. The Eucharist is “a limitless wellspring for all authentic Christian commitment to

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<sup>180</sup> Power, “Eucharistic Justice,” 877.

<sup>181</sup> Cf. 2 Corinthians 5:20.

<sup>182</sup> Scott, *The Eucharist and Social Justice*, 29.

<sup>183</sup> Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On The Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Malden MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1998), 237-238.

peace.”<sup>184</sup> Here in this liturgical encounter, one’s heart is prepared to seek peaceable relationships and to build up the unity of the human family.

Attaining peace is surely not an easy task and humans will never be able to achieve true lasting peace on their own, but the Eucharist, “a sacrament of peace,”<sup>185</sup> offers a plan. It teaches that prayer is the primary way “that the Church engages in the battle for peace.”<sup>186</sup> Only through prayer, of which the Eucharist is the greatest, can reconciliation, peace, and justice come about. In this prayerful encounter with the living God, “Christians learn to experience the Eucharist as *a great school of peace*, forming men and women who, at various levels of responsibility in social, cultural and political life, can become promoters of dialogue and communion.”<sup>187</sup> The God of Peace does not cease to educate His students in this school and remains with them as they strive to bring peace to individuals and to society as a whole. In the Eucharist above all, the Church prays that God will assist in the creation of peace within our hearts, within our communities, and throughout the world.<sup>188</sup> The Mass contains many occasions for praying for peace. For example, the opening of the Gloria echoes the theme of peace and peace in the world is often one of the petitions during the General Intercessions. The United States Bishops note that “nowhere is the Church’s urgent plea for peace more evident in the liturgy than in the Communion Rite.”<sup>189</sup> Of special significance in the Communion Rite is the sign of peace. Pope Benedict XVI elaborates on the importance of this action in the midst of a divided world:

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<sup>184</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, n. 519.

<sup>185</sup> *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 49.

<sup>186</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, n. 519.

<sup>187</sup> *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 27.

<sup>188</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “The Challenge of Peace: God’s Promise and Our Response” in *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage*, ed. David J. O’Brien and Thomas A. Shannon (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), n. 295.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*

In our times, fraught with fear and conflict, this gesture has become particularly eloquent, as the church has become increasingly conscious of her responsibility to pray insistently for the gift of peace and unity for herself and for the whole human family. Certainly there is an irrepressible desire for peace present in every heart. The Church gives voice to hope for peace and reconciliation rising up from every man and woman of good will, directing it towards the one who “is our peace” (Eph 2:14) and who can bring peace to individuals and peoples when all human efforts fail.<sup>190</sup>

The sign of peace most vividly expresses the desire for reconciliation and for peace to reign in the unity of the one human family. Thus, it can be considered an outward sign of the Christian’s commitment to social justice

### 3.5 Sacrifice

The final Eucharist-justice theme to be examined in this chapter has been alluded to fairly often in all that has preceded, but deserves more direct treatment: the meaning of sacrifice. The Eucharist makes present the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary and the two are one and the same.<sup>191</sup> Yet, the Eucharist is also an oblation of the entire Church, as those assembled offer themselves to the Father in and through Christ: “In the Eucharist the sacrifice of Christ becomes also the sacrifice of the members of his Body. The lives of the faithful, their praise, sufferings, prayer, and work, are united with those of Christ and with his total offering, and so acquire a new value.”<sup>192</sup> Both on the cross and in the Eucharist, Christ gives Himself totally and completely to His Church and models the type of sacrifice He desires. Having received the transformative gift of God, “we are empowered to act in relation to others as God relates to us—with self-sacrificing love.”<sup>193</sup> The priority lies with God’s sacrifice, as it is only when one experiences the depths of His sacrifice that one is able to give of oneself in a similar manner. Thus, participating in

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<sup>190</sup> *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 49.

<sup>191</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1367.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 1368.

<sup>193</sup> Seasoltz, *God’s Gift Giving: In Christ Through the Spirit*, 74-75.

the Eucharist is absolutely essential for the work of social justice, since it is here that one experiences, receives, and consumes the fullness of God's self-gift.

In the western world where materialism, consumerism, and individualism reign, the idea of sacrifice can seem quite foreign and difficult to accept. Yet, sacrifice is necessary for the uprooting of injustice and is what the Eucharist itself calls for. The Orthodox priest and liturgical theologian, Alexander Schmemmann, asserts how diametrically different consumerism and Eucharistic sacrifice are:

Opposed to sacrifice is consumerism: the idea that everything belongs to me and I have to grab it—and we are restored only by the complex movement exemplified by the Eucharist where we offer ourselves and are accepted through Christ's offering of Himself.<sup>194</sup>

Paradoxically, sacrifice—death or dying to self—is actually the gift of life and life is fully experienced as authentic love. Sacrifice gives life to others, but the self also becomes more fully alive through it.<sup>195</sup> Still, life, or self-sacrificing love, is first and foremost the gift of God Himself. The task of the Christian, then, is to share God's gift of Himself, received primarily in the Eucharist, with others. At the heart of social justice is the sacrificial sharing of the gift with the poor, the widow, the lonely, and the immigrant. Etymologically, "sacrifice" comes from the Latin *sacra facere*, "to make holy." When one dies to oneself and puts others' needs first, he or she actually contributes to the ongoing sanctification of the world. This is only appropriate since the daily sacrifices of Christians can be understood as miniature expressions and continuations of Christ's own sacrifice—the same gift of Self made present at each Eucharist. In order to bring our discussion in this chapter to a close, we can return to the thought of one of our Liturgical

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<sup>194</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, "Sacrifice and Worship," in *Liturgy and Tradition: Theological Reflections of Alexander Schmemmann*, ed. Thomas Fisch (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990), 130.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*



Movement figures, Virgil Michel, and hear how he speaks of the liturgy and the meaning of sacrifice. The Mass is truly both the sacrifice of Christ and oblation of the people, who unite themselves to Christ's perfect offering. The sacrifice serves as an encounter with the Divine, who meets the people, receives their offering, and gives them something far greater in return:

In the Mass the people offer themselves. From the very beginning the gifts offered truly represent part of their own lives. In return they receive of the divine life. They receive ever greater spiritual strength to live the life of Christ at all moments of the day. By offering themselves in the Mass, therefore, they receive the grace to fulfill the words of St. Paul also outside the Mass: 'Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing unto God' (Rom. 12,1).<sup>196</sup>

Sacrifice and denial of self are necessary to make room for God—to receive His life—and to allow Him to work. Only when one empties oneself is one able to act as Christ in the world: to lay down one's own body for the sake of others and to love unto death.

In this chapter, I have highlighted several major Eucharist-justice connections. In the Eucharist, the unity of the one Body of Christ is most fully experienced and all are welcomed to sit at the Eucharistic table. The Eucharist expresses how all are members of one, universal human family and requires that solidarity shape human relationships. As a meal, the Eucharist demands that all have their share of food and calls all who partake in the Supper to be food for others in imitation of Christ who gives Himself to be consumed. It also announces the reign of God's justice, as the Wedding Feast of the Lamb, where no one will go hungry, is experienced in the present. The coming of God's Kingdom makes it imperative that all who celebrate the Eucharist treat the poor with justice, as judgment becomes a present reality. Furthermore, the Eucharist, the sacrament of humanity's reconciliation with God, always seeks to bring about reconciliation and peace among

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<sup>196</sup> Virgil Michel and Louis Trandler, "The Mass as the People's Sacrifice," *Orate Fratres* 1 no. 7 (May 15, 1927): 214.

peoples, and the latter is not possible without the former. Finally, the Eucharist as a sacrifice suggests that social justice requires an authentic gift of oneself in love. Any attempt to remove these social justice connections will prove futile, as these themes are intrinsically woven into the very fabric of the Eucharistic liturgy. They are fundamental to the greatest prayer of the Church because they are what her Head desired and what He Himself exemplified in His own life and ministry. In the next chapter, I will examine how the Eucharist assimilates one to Christ in order to continue His very mission in the world.

#### CHAPTER FOUR: The Transformative Character of the Eucharist: Sent to Be Missionaries for Justice

The Eucharistic liturgy is a deeply transformative experience and event. Although the change—the extent of which depends upon the believer’s disposition of receptivity—may be subtle and unnoticed, one never leaves the Mass exactly the same as before. In every Eucharistic celebration, one is granted the opportunity to encounter Christ, who never leaves His Church. The Head of the Body is present in His minister, in the power of the sacraments, in the assembly, in His Word, and in His Body and Blood.<sup>197</sup> While all these forms of Christ’s presence are real and thus transformative, the reception of Christ’s Body and Blood serves as the most intimate encounter with the Risen Lord and, for this reason, it may seem to be prioritized here. Meeting the Lord in the Eucharist is a powerful experience with profound consequences: assimilation to Christ, conversion, and mission. The goal of this chapter is to examine these three effects of Eucharistic participation in light of the call to work for social justice.

By partaking in the Eucharistic celebration, one becomes more like Christ. One meets and receives the God who, as a servant, ministers to and is the friend of the poor—who even identifies with the poor.<sup>198</sup> Living an entire life of service, culminating with His death on the cross, He was anointed to proclaim good news to the poor and freedom to the captive, to bring sight to the blind, and to liberate the oppressed.<sup>199</sup> As the Church recalls the death of the Lord during the Mass, she remembers Christ crucified and in Him the face of the poor, the marginalized, and the suffering. She personally encounters the One who proclaims victory over death, oppression, and injustice through His

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<sup>197</sup> Cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 7.

<sup>198</sup> Cf. Matthew 25: 40, 45.

<sup>199</sup> Cf. Luke: 4:18.

resurrection.<sup>200</sup> Both the Church as a whole and her individual members are conformed to Him in the Eucharist, as it is here that “Christ’s power is unleashed; it is a power over which the church has no control. His power is dynamic and transforming.”<sup>201</sup> Christ’s transformative action is carried out by the working of the Holy Spirit. During the Eucharistic Prayer’s consecratory epiclesis, the Church prays that God will send down His Spirit upon the gifts of bread and wine so that they become the Body and Blood of Christ; during the Communion-epiclesis, she prays that God will also send his Spirit down upon all gathered. As a result of this double epiclesis, those who partake in the Eucharistic meal are utterly changed. At each Eucharist, the Church throughout the world seeks to be transformed into the likeness of her head: “Consider that day after day, week after week, small and large groups of people gather to be influenced, changed, and conformed ever more closely to Christ.”<sup>202</sup> Eucharistic celebrations are directed towards the transformation of individuals, communities, the entire Church and, by extension, the whole world.

The Eucharist also alters relationships among people: rich and poor, employers and employees, friends and enemies. Relationships begin to take on the mode of Christ’s self-emptying, as the Eucharist makes present and expresses Christ’s *kenosis* on the cross.<sup>203</sup> For the work of social justice, this transformative effect of the Eucharist cannot be overlooked. The Eucharistic celebration possesses:

the power to shape us as a certain kind of people—people who defend the life and dignity of the human person, seek the common good, serve the poor and the

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<sup>200</sup> Scott, *The Eucharist and Social Justice*, 82-83.

<sup>201</sup> Seasoltz, *God’s Gift Giving*, 240.

<sup>202</sup> James M. Donahue, “The Liturgy as a Source of Formation in Catholic Social Teaching,” in *The Heart of Catholic Social Teaching: Its Origins and Contemporary Significance*, ed. David Matzko McCarthy (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 32.

<sup>203</sup> Rodica Stoicoiu, “Eucharist and Social Justice,” in *The Heart of Catholic Social Teaching: Its Origins and Contemporary Significance*, ed. David Matzko McCarthy (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 48.

vulnerable among us, hunger and thirst for justice, live in solidarity with the whole human family, work for peace, and become good stewards of God's creation.<sup>204</sup>

The Eucharist has the potential to alter the world and to make it a more just place because it transforms the individuals who live in society. Hence, it is of the highest importance that lay people actively participate in the liturgy, as it is their specific duty to bring worldly affairs into conformity with the will of God.<sup>205</sup> Assimilating them to the humble Lover of the poor, the Eucharist forms all those present—clergy and laity alike—to act as Christ in the world, to imitate what they see, hear, and touch.

In order to best understand the importance of the Eucharist's transformative effect in relationship to the work of social justice, special, direct attention must be given to the reception of Holy Communion. In *Being Consumed*, William Cavanaugh argues that the Eucharist forms one to consume rightly, not viewing Jesus as one commodity among others to be used for individual benefit.<sup>206</sup> Rather, one consumes Jesus' sacramental Body and Blood in the Eucharist only to be made into and taken up into Christ: "We are consumers in the Eucharist, but in consuming the body of Christ we are transformed into the body of Christ, drawn into the divine life in communion with other people. We consume in the Eucharist, but we are thereby consumed by God."<sup>207</sup> Typically, food is integrated into the body of the one who eats it. The contrary occurs in the Eucharist, as the one who eats the Body of Christ is transformed into it. Augustine hears the Lord say to him: "I am the food of the fully grown; grow and you fill fed on me. And you will not change me into you like the food your flesh eats, but you will be changed into me."<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Donahue, "The Liturgy as a Source of Formation in Catholic Social Teaching," 41.

<sup>205</sup> Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 31.

<sup>206</sup> Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed*, 54.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>208</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 124 [VII.16].

Aquinas echoes Augustine when he writes that spiritual food—the Eucharist—changes the one who eats it into itself.<sup>209</sup> Since one becomes what one receives in the Eucharistic feast, one takes on the qualities of Whom is received, becoming therefore more compassionate, merciful, selfless, humble, and loving; it makes one more like the One who was zealous for justice, respected the dignity of the human person, and concerned Himself with the needs of the poor. In essence, constant reception of the Eucharist increases those various virtues that characterize fruitful social justice endeavors, since the One received perfectly loved and served those suffering and ostracized.

Eucharistic transformation, however, is never purely an individual experience, as all are united and made into the one Body of Christ. Again, the thought of Augustine, who is highly concerned with the ecclesiological significance of the Eucharist, is helpful:

If you are the body and members of Christ, then it is your sacrament that is placed on the table of the Lord; it is your sacrament that you receive. To that which you are you respond ‘Amen’ (‘yes, it is true!’) and by responding to it you assent to it. For you hear the words, ‘the Body of Christ’ and respond ‘Amen.’ Be then a member of the Body of Christ that your *Amen* may be true.<sup>210</sup>

In the Eucharist, the assembly receives and affirms their identity as members of the Body Christ. In order for their reception of the sacrament to be authentic, they must act as the Body of Christ, meaning that they must live in unity and harmony with one another. The ecclesial Body lives as Christ in the world. Augustine wants his congregation to know the significance of their identity as the Body of Christ: “In you and through you the work of the incarnation must go forward. You are to be taken; you are to be blessed, broken, and given; that you may be the means of grace and the vehicles of the Eternal love. Behold

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<sup>209</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III. q. 73, a.3.

<sup>210</sup> Augustine, *Sermon 272*, quoted in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1396.

what you are. Become what you receive.”<sup>211</sup> Reception of the Eucharist transforms the Church into the broken and shared Body of Christ, so that the world may continue to benefit from the work of Christ.<sup>212</sup> As the living presence of Christ in every place and time, the ecclesial community is the locus of contact between God and humanity; it serves to bring God’s reconciling love to humanity, just as Christ did. Overall, the fundamental reason that the sacramental Body of Christ is consumed is so that those who receive it become the Body. Union with Christ is strengthened and His life grows within them—the primary effect of receiving Holy Communion.<sup>213</sup> United all the more to their Head through the reception of Holy Communion, the members of the Body continue Christ’s self-gift in the world.

In the Eucharist, the Church’s members meet and consume the One who gives Himself totally and freely as a gift to be received and shared. The self-emptying of Christ on the cross is continually bestowed as a gift and celebrated in the Eucharist.<sup>214</sup> This gift is invaluable and utterly unearned, yet God, who cannot be outdone in generosity, desires all to share in it. In the Eucharist, the Church receives the gift of God and offers it back to Him in an act of thanksgiving. Through receptivity to and thanksgiving for God’s gift of Himself in the Eucharistic celebration, the Church allows herself to be transformed:

We open our lives to a divine gift which comes to us in Christ by the power of the Spirit, a gift which invites us to offer our human thanksgiving, thus opening our hearts so we receive the gift which allows God to be God in our lives. It is God’s

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<sup>211</sup> Augustine, *Sermon 57, On the Holy Eucharist*, quoted in “Meditations,” *The Episcopal Diocese of Virginia*, accessed April 23, 2014, [http://www.thediocese.net/Customer-Content/WWW/CMS/files/Council\\_2013/council213\\_meditations.pdf](http://www.thediocese.net/Customer-Content/WWW/CMS/files/Council_2013/council213_meditations.pdf).

<sup>212</sup> For his part, Aquinas considered the sacraments to be prolongations of the Incarnation. Hence, his treatment of the sacraments directly follows his treatment of Christology: “After considering those things that concern the mystery of the incarnate Word, we must consider the sacraments of the Church which derive their efficacy from the Word incarnate Himself” (*ST III*, q.60).

<sup>213</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1391.

<sup>214</sup> Stoicoiu, “Eucharist and Social Justice,” 46-47.

presence in our hearts which transforms us so we are glorified by God's initiative.<sup>215</sup> Although the Eucharist and the transformation it brings about are primarily God's action, we must embrace His gift and cooperate. The reality of Christ's presence in the Eucharist is certain on account of it being God's gift of Himself, but its effect is contingent upon our response. Transformation requires openness: "If there is not a disposition of receptivity, of faith and love on the part of the human subject, there is certainly no transformation of the human subject."<sup>216</sup> When such a disposition is lacking, we reject the gift of God and make it something to be used and then discarded, failing to receive the presence of God in the sacrament as such.<sup>217</sup> However, when we are receptive to Eucharist as a gift that transforms, we become what we are supposed to be: a gift for others. As those who have consumed what they themselves are, the Church's members are to exist in the world as a gift.<sup>218</sup> Being a gift to one another—and in this context, specifically to the poor and suffering—is the response to God's gift of Himself. In the thought of Louis-Marie Chauvet, gift requires return-gift and sound ethical practice is an aspect of the response to God's gracious and gratuitous gift of Himself.<sup>219</sup> Following the thought of Chauvet, Seasoltz writes, "...the ethical practices of justice and mercy are the essential dimensions of our return gift."<sup>220</sup> Thus, caring for the poor and suffering, working towards the equal distribution of goods and wealth, establishing just wages and proper working conditions, seeking reconciliation and peace in relationships and the like are all a part of the return-gift—the gift that we, the transformed, offer back to God.

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<sup>215</sup> Seasoltz, *God's Gift Giving*, 74.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>217</sup> Louis-Marie Chauvet, *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 124.

<sup>218</sup> While I have already discussed the concept of gift in chapter three, especially in the section on sacrifice, I am treating the subject here in the context of transformation.

<sup>219</sup> Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1995), 281.

<sup>220</sup> Seasoltz, *God's Gift Giving*, 75.



Conformity to Christ that results from Eucharistic participation necessarily entails conversion. Conversion is the response to Christ's gift of Himself—His gift of love—in the Eucharist. This conversion of heart is not solely an interior experience, but rather must be expressed outwardly in one's relationships with others. Benedict XVI describes the proper response to receiving Christ's total gift as “an authentic conversion to love, in forgiveness, in welcoming one another, and being attentive to the needs of everyone.”<sup>221</sup> When one meets Christ in the Eucharist and receives Him, one's heart, outlook, and priorities change. Having been taught by the Eucharist the meaning of sacrificial love, one learns to look beyond oneself. The inner gaze moves outward and a genuine concern for others replaces preoccupation with the self's needs and desires. In the heart of one who lives a truly Eucharistic life, selflessness instead of selfishness prevails; thanksgiving instead of ingratitude; humility instead of pride; peace instead of discord; love instead of hatred. All these positive qualities, which are fruits of constant participation in the Eucharist, are critical for social justice work. By turning away from selfishness and turning towards Christ, one is able to escape the grasp of a “world dominated by individualism, materialism, consumerism, and violence.”<sup>222</sup> Calling the believer to ever-deeper conversion, the Eucharist alters the way he or she exists in and understands his or her relationship to other people and things: “The Eucharist offers a new way of thinking and a new way of loving.”<sup>223</sup> It prompts detachment from goods and money and the sharing of those things with others and it affirms the ultimate value of the human person. John Paul II affirms the connection between the Eucharist and appreciating the unsurpassable dignity of each person, in whom the Lord Himself dwells: “If our

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<sup>221</sup> Benedict XVI, *The Eucharist Spiritual Thought Series*, 92.

<sup>222</sup> Donahue, “The Liturgy as a Source of Formation in Catholic Social Teaching,” 40.

<sup>223</sup> Scott, *The Eucharist and Social Justice*, 96.

Eucharistic worship is authentic, it must make us grow in awareness of the dignity of each person. The awareness of that dignity becomes the deepest motive of our relationship with our neighbor.”<sup>224</sup> Participating in the Eucharist, thus, helps one to see others as God sees them—through the Divine lens, as opposed to humanity’s murky one.

Conversion prompted by Eucharistic participation is not an easy process. In the light of the Eucharist—in the light of Christ—the darkest areas of one’s life and one’s shortcomings are uncovered. Such enlightenment is, at best, uncomfortable and, more likely, painful. Putting to death one’s selfishness hurts, yet it is necessary and is precisely what the Eucharist calls one to do. Eucharistic participation, therefore, is not for the faint of heart:

The Eucharist is meant to change us, to turn our perspective away from self and toward the other. Hence the Eucharist is a dangerous activity. It is a risky endeavor if we value our self-sufficiency and who we have made ourselves to be. In our celebrations, by contrast, we fully and consciously seek to be transformed by God. We are at risk of loss and change.<sup>225</sup>

Believers are vulnerable to having their priorities changed: I am no longer the center of my own universe. They hazard being called to do something radical: “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor.”<sup>226</sup> They dare to step out into the messy work of social justice—to love “the unclean.” The loss of self is a frightening reality, but should not be surprising, for at the Eucharist the Church actively remembers the life and death of the One who gave up His whole life for others. In the Church’s anamnesis, the events of Christ’s life become a present reality, a reality that has substantial effects on the worshipping community. Anamnesis, like the Eucharistic encounter as a whole, is not without risk: “The making memory of the Cross is dangerous

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<sup>224</sup> *Dominicae Cenaes*, 6.

<sup>225</sup> Stoicoiu, “Eucharist and Social Justice,” 46.

<sup>226</sup> Matthew 19:21.

because it calls the baptized to conversion.”<sup>227</sup> This anamnestic conversion is cruciform. One turns away from the self only to be led to Calvary. A dangerous, brutal place, Calvary is where Christ’s body was broken and His blood was poured out, and it is to this place that the members of His body are called to travel. At the same time, Calvary is the place where Love triumphs and is most fully demonstrated. Loving others is not a safe endeavor, but rather dangerous. The Eucharist converts the Church’s members to dangerous Love, for the transformation of the world depends upon precisely this kind.

Assimilated to Christ and led to conversion in the Eucharist, the Church is sent out on a mission to serve others and to work for justice. She does not create her own mission or agenda, but rather continues Christ’s own mission of love and self-sacrifice. Conformity to Christ includes conformity to His mission; the mission of the Body and the mission of the Head are one and the same. At the Eucharistic table, the Church is continually incorporated into Christ’s mission that extends to all people.<sup>228</sup> Not only does the Eucharist carry with it the impulse for mission, it also sustains the Church as she works to carry out the tiring work of social justice. John Paul II notes that the Eucharist “provides the interior strength needed for this mission.”<sup>229</sup> Identifying the Eucharist with the fullness of God’s love, Benedict XVI echoes his predecessor when he calls the Eucharist the “spiritual nourishment for our mission in the world.”<sup>230</sup> While it cannot be reduced to a mere spiritual boost, the Eucharist, the Bread of Life and the food that endures forever, does aid the Church and readies her to engage in social justice activities. The Eucharistic liturgy is able to “transform the celebrants and empower them to return

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<sup>227</sup> Theresa F. Koernke, “Eucharist, Spirit, Dangerous Memory,” in *New Theology Review* 20, no. 1 (February 2007): 38.

<sup>228</sup> *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 84.

<sup>229</sup> *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 25.

<sup>230</sup> Benedict XVI, *The Eucharist: Spiritual Thought Series*, 102.

to life with deeper understanding, renewed strength and invigorated hope.”<sup>231</sup> The Eucharist nourishes the Church so that she can persevere on the difficult, frustrating, and often disappointing road to true justice. It is the Church’s perpetual source of strength, as Christ never ceases to give her the fullness of His life in the sacrament. Apart from Christ, the Church would lose her vigor and all her attempts to build a more just society would ultimately fail.

Christ transforms those who partake of His Body and Blood into Himself not for their sakes alone, but so that they can go forth and transform the world. The Concluding Rites, especially the dismissal, serve as the most explicit reminder of the Mass’s missionary nature. After the final blessing, the priest or deacon dismisses the people “so that each may go back to doing good works, praising and blessing God.”<sup>232</sup>

Etymologically, “dismissal” derives from the Latin *dis* + *mittere*, “to send away.” The assembly is dismissed, or sent away, from the Eucharistic celebration in the peace of Christ to serve the Lord and to glorify Him by their lives. Serving the least of His people is certainly an essential part of the way one serves and glorifies God. In his apostolic letter commemorating the Year of the Eucharist, *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, John Paul II highlights the importance of the dismissal: “The dismissal at the end of each Mass is a *charge* given to Christians, inviting them to work for the spread of the Gospel and the imbuing of society with Christian values.”<sup>233</sup> The Holy Father’s phrasing is worth noting. At the Eucharist, the Church is given the *imperative* to work for social justice, yet it still remains an invitation. The Lord commands His Church to continue His mission in the world, but He never forces her. The Church must respond to His urging and actively

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<sup>231</sup> Seasoltz, “Justice and the Eucharist,” 309.

<sup>232</sup> *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 90.

<sup>233</sup> *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 24.

cooperate with Him for the transformation of society. At the end of each Eucharist, the Church reaffirms her willing commitment to Christ's mission. Again and again, she says, "yes" to the call of the Eucharistic Lord to lay her life down—just as He said, "yes" to the will of the Father for the life of the world.

Strengthened by Christ in the Eucharist, the Church's members are sent forth to witness to the love of God. Often, the poor, the lonely, and the outcast desperately need to hear about God's infinite compassion, mercy, and love and it is the responsibility of the Church to express this to them in both word and deed. There can never be a total separation between social justice and evangelization, between the tasks of demonstrating the Good News and speaking the Good News; these are intimately intertwined as parts of the same mission. By spreading the message of the Gospel with both words and actions, the Church accomplishes the central goal of the entire mission that the Eucharist entrusts to her: "to bring Christ to others."<sup>234</sup> As the center of the Church's whole life, the Eucharist is at the core of her evangelizing mission. Those who partake in the Eucharist cannot keep what they experience and learn during the liturgy locked within the church's four walls. When one encounters the Eucharistic Lord, one cannot help telling others about whom they have met: "The love that we celebrate in the sacrament is not something we can keep to ourselves. By its very nature it demands to be shared with all. What the world needs is God's love; it needs to encounter Christ and believe in him."<sup>235</sup> Social justice involves sharing God's love—evangelization in its most fundamental form—with the least of these. Both social justice and God's love flow from the wellspring of the Eucharist. Connecting the Eucharist, evangelization, and elements of

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<sup>234</sup> *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 86.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

social justice, Benedict XVI writes: “Whoever receives Christ in the reality of his Body and Blood cannot keep this gift to himself, but is impelled to share in courageous witness to the Gospel, in service to brothers and sisters in need, in pardoning offenses.”<sup>236</sup> The Eucharist sends the Church forth on a mission that is evangelical in nature. Trying to completely separate the Church’s commitment to social justice from her evangelization efforts is an error and impedes the spread of the Gospel. The call to work for justice and the call to tell others about the saving Good News are intimately intertwined, for both are the command of Christ, the Word of God made flesh and consumed daily in the Eucharist.

The mission that the Eucharist mandates for the Church is also eschatological. All who partake in the Eucharist are sent into the world to establish the Kingdom of God on earth *as far as possible*. Transformed by the Eucharistic encounter into the One who came into the world to announce the arrival of God’s Kingdom, the Church’s members are called to “carry out the mission of Christ in the world, bringing forth the kingdom of God through service to the poor, to those who are slaves, those who daily face humiliation and death in a thousand different ways.”<sup>237</sup> By building a just community and establishing the Kingdom of God—albeit incompletely—the Church announces an end to suffering and bears witness to the reality of a better future. This witness becomes authentic when one selflessly shares oneself with others, following the example of Christ’s self-sacrifice: “This desperate world craves for witnesses to the hope of Jesus Christ, not just for proclaimers of that hope. Our own lives take on the fullest measure of

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<sup>236</sup> Benedict XVI, *The Eucharist: Spiritual Thought Series*, 103.

<sup>237</sup> Stoicoiu, “Eucharist and Social Justice,” 48.

Christ's hope when we give of ourselves most generously."<sup>238</sup> Part of the Church's eschatological mission, therefore, is to bring hope to those despairing. Another aspect of this mission involves a willingness to forgive others and to ask for forgiveness from both God and fellow man. Since Christ has already rid the world of its sins in His sacrifice on the cross, "the task of the Christian is to live now as if that is in fact the case, to embody redemption by living a reconciled life, and thereby bring the Kingdom, however incompletely, into the present."<sup>239</sup> When one seeks reconciliation and the restoration of the relationships—a prerequisite for proper participation in the Eucharist—one helps to establish the lasting home of the reconciled in the here-and-now. The Church is sent from the Eucharist to actualize the reign of God.<sup>240</sup> As the one Body of Christ, she carries out her mission and tries to help all experience the reality of God's reign.

To understand the inseparable connection that exists between Eucharistic participation, eschatological mission, and social justice, the thought of Alexander Schmemmann is especially worth noting. Schmemmann asserts the primacy of the Eucharistic liturgy for the Church's social mission. In the liturgy, the Church journeys—ascends—into the reality of God's Kingdom, the world as already perfected in Christ. Here, she receives and is strengthened by the Food of Life from Christ's hands at the heavenly banquet. Having seen the joy and the light of the Kingdom, the Church's members begin their return journey to earthly life. They are now prepared "to be His witnesses, to fulfill what He has done and is ever doing. This is the meaning of the Eucharist; this is why the mission of the Church begins in the liturgy of ascension, for it

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<sup>238</sup> Roger Mahony, "The Eucharist and Social Justice," *Worship* 57, no. 1 (January 1, 1983): 59.

<sup>239</sup> Cavanaugh, *Torture and the Eucharist*, 239.

<sup>240</sup> Dempsey, "Celebrating Justice: The Sacramental Connection," 53.

alone makes possible the liturgy of mission.”<sup>241</sup> Social justice activities are rendered futile if the Church does not first meet Christ in glory. Schmemmann describes what happens when the Church erroneously prioritizes her social mission over the Eucharistic liturgy:

Christianity begins to fall down as soon as the idea of our going up in Christ’s ascension—the movement of sacrifice—begins to be replaced by His going down. And this is exactly where we are today: it is always a bringing Him into ordinary life, and this we say will solve our social problems. The Church must go down into the ghettos, into the world in all its reality. But to save the world from social injustices, the need first of all is not so much to go down to its miseries, as to have a few witnesses in this world to the possible ascension.<sup>242</sup>

The Church’s primary mission, then, is to journey to Christ in the liturgy. Only when she does this is she able to accomplish her mission in the world: to testify to the hope, the peace, and the joy of the Kingdom and to bring about that Kingdom as far as possible.

If the Church ignores or rejects her evangelical and eschatological mission of justice and love, her celebration of the Eucharist is lacking.<sup>243</sup> Eucharist can never remain an insular event, but must flow into the ordinary events, encounters, and actions that constitute everyday life. In his first encyclical, Benedict XVI aptly states, “‘Worship’ itself, Eucharistic communion, includes the reality both of being loved and of loving others in turn. A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented.”<sup>244</sup> In the Eucharist, the Church experiences the greatness of God’s total, selfless love, as she receives the One who was broken as bread for the life of the world. Benedict refers to this as “liturgical agape” and asserts that it must become

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<sup>241</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1973), 46.

<sup>242</sup> Schmemmann, “Sacrifice and Worship,” 135.

<sup>243</sup> The Eucharist, as God’s gift and primarily the action of Christ, is perfect and, from this perspective, lacks nothing. However, *the Church’s* celebration of the Eucharist remains incomplete when it does not result in lived mission: the actual service of others.

<sup>244</sup> *Deus Caritas Est*, 14.



“love in daily life” if the Eucharist is to be considered complete.<sup>245</sup> John Paul II expresses a similar idea—one already noted in chapter three—when he describes the legitimacy of the Church’s Eucharistic celebrations as dependent upon the way she loves and cares for the needy.<sup>246</sup> Reception of Holy Communion fails to have its intended effect if the communicant does not go forth from the Eucharist to engage in service and sacrifice and to live out Christ’s example and command of selfless love. The Eucharist demands that believers live differently than how they lived before. It demands that they live as missionaries of God’s love, mercy, and justice through service to others. To partake in the Eucharistic meal and then to not participate in the mission is a contradiction. Without washing the feet of others, the meal is incomplete and loses its significance.

To summarize, the Eucharist is a transformative encounter that deeply alters the lives of individual believers and the Church as a whole Body. We are made into the likeness of the One who is received: the humble Lover of the poor. We become what we receive. We are made a gift to be broken and shared for the benefit of others. We engage in that difficult, dangerous process of conversion. Gradually, our selfishness and individualism are overcome and are replaced by selflessness and a genuine concern for the needs of others. We are dismissed from the Eucharist and go forth into the world as missionaries of His love and missionaries of justice. We are commissioned to continue the transformation of the world and to contribute to the building of a more just society—to proclaim a message of hope and to establish as completely as possible the reign of God in the here-and-now. In the Eucharist, we are changed. From the Eucharist, we are sent. If we do not participate in the mission that the Eucharist inaugurates, if we do not act as if

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<sup>245</sup> Benedict XVI, *The Eucharist: Spiritual Thought Series*, 92.

<sup>246</sup> *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 28.

we have been changed in and through an intimate encounter with God, if we do not live according to our identity as the living and active Body of Christ, then our celebrations of the Eucharist mean nothing for the life and wellbeing of the world. All who participate in the Eucharist and are changed must contribute to the Church's social mission in some way, according to their own gifts, financial status, and personal circumstances. One way all the members of Christ's Body can participate in the mission is through personal and communal prayer. Above all, regular participation in and return to the Church's greatest prayer, the Eucharist, is what is critical to support and energize those who have been sent forth to transform the world. In the next chapter, I will identify and examine specific parts of the Mass during which we pray for social justice-related needs.

## CHAPTER FIVE: Discovering Social Justice References within the Mass

Nothing that is said or done during the Eucharistic liturgy is without value. Often, what is said and done expresses something of meaning for the Church's social mission. The entire Mass reveals both direct and subtle references to the tenets of Catholic social teaching. *Lex orandi, lex credendi*, the law of prayer governs the law of belief; what we pray during the Mass demonstrates what we believe. When our prayer is filled with references to Catholic social teaching, it means that we, as a Church, believe in the dignity of the human person, the importance of caring for the poor and suffering, the unity of the human family, and the like. Expressions of the close relationship between worship and social justice—between love of God and love of neighbor—are not limited to one part of the Eucharistic liturgy. In this chapter, I will present major aspects of the Mass that speak to social justice, excluding those not already addressed above.<sup>247</sup> The chapter will culminate with an analysis of Eucharistic prayer texts in order to demonstrate that social justice themes are even evident in what many would deem the climatic moment of the Eucharistic celebration.

First, the music selections at Mass are often filled with lyrics about justice, peace, harmony, and service of others. David Haas's "We are Called" immediately comes to mind. In addition to echoing Micah's assertion that God requires us to seek justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with Him,<sup>248</sup> the song encourages us to rejoice in eschatological hope: "Sing, sing a new song. Sing of that great day when all will be one. God will reign and we'll walk with each other as sisters and brothers united in love."<sup>249</sup> Similarly, "City

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<sup>247</sup> The sign of peace and the fraction rite are discussed in chapter three and the dismissal is discussed at length in chapter four.

<sup>248</sup> Cf. Micah 6:8.

<sup>249</sup> David Haas, "We are Called," *On a Wing and a Prayer, Vol.2: We are Called* Joppa Jive, 2010.

of God” highlights the eschatological mission that the Eucharist bestows: “The Lord of all kindness has called us to be a light for all people to set their hearts free. Let us build the city of God.”<sup>250</sup> “Sent Forth By God’s Blessing” specifies how the Eucharist serves as an invitation to build God’s Kingdom; it affirms that the experience of the Mass should remain with us in the concrete moments of our daily lives:

The supper ended. Oh, now be extended the fruits of this service in all who believe. The seed of His teaching, receptive souls reaching, shall blossom in action for God and for all. His grace did invite us, His love shall unite us to work for God’s kingdom and answer His call.<sup>251</sup>

The title of the song itself emphasizes the Eucharist’s missionary dimension. Music selections such as these are most effective when used as the recessional, since they emphasize the social justice mission that we are to take up again as soon as the final note is played—as soon as we exit the church’s doors and return to daily life. “The Summons” is another fine example of liturgical music that promotes social justice and specifically our mission to serve and love the least among us: “Will you set the prisoners free and never be the same? Will you kiss the leper clean and do such as this unseen?”<sup>252</sup> This song also highlights how service of the poor and ostracized—involvement in social justice—is a transformative experience. Jesus’ words in Matthew 25: 31-40 are put to music in “Whatsoever You Do”: “Whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers, that you do unto me.”<sup>253</sup> “Let There Be Peace on Earth” and “The Prayer of St. Francis,” meanwhile, both express the individual’s role and responsibility in the establishment of peace. These are only a few examples of the many commonly used hymns that

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<sup>250</sup> Dan Schutte, “City of God,” *Lord of Light* Pilgrim Music, 1981.

<sup>251</sup> WLP Choir, “Sent Forth By God’s Blessing,” *Catholic Treasures IV: Classics of Praise and Honor* World Library Publications, 2008.

<sup>252</sup> Robert Kochis, “The Summons,” *You Are Near* New Light Records, 2004.

<sup>253</sup> Greg Capozzi, “Whatsoever You Do,” *The Mission* Vienna Records, 2007.

incorporate social justice themes. During these songs, we actively reflect on how we can best serve others and live out the principles of Catholic social teaching in our own lives. We pray, too, for God’s assistance in our mission and for the grace to hear and respond to His call.

Although they are somewhat obscure, references to social justice can be found in the Introductory Rites. During the Penitential Act, all have the opportunity to acknowledge their sins and ask God for His pardon and peace. Each person admits in the words of the Confiteor that he or she has sinned “in what I have done and in what I have failed to do.” Sins committed may involve stealing from the needy or intentionally supporting organizations and companies that mistreat their workers; sins of omission may include ignoring the poor beggar on the corner or failing to visit the shut-in family member in the nursing home or hospital. During this part of the Mass, we seek God’s forgiveness for all the times we have not loved the poor and suffering as He has called us to. Social justice themes can also be heard in the opening Collect. We may, for example, request the establishment of peace in a divided, violent world. In the Collect for the Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time, the Church prays: “Grant us, O Lord, we pray, that the course of our world may be directed by your peaceful rule.”<sup>254</sup> The Collect for the Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time expresses how things—money—should never take priority, but should always help us attain Heaven: “...grant that, with you as our ruler and guide, we may use the good things that pass in such a way as to hold fast even now to those that ever endure.” The Collect for the Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time is directed to God, “who founded all the commands of your sacred Law upon love

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<sup>254</sup> All collect excerpts taken from “Daily Roman Missal,” *The Liturgy Archive*, accessed May 1, 2014. [http://www.liturgies.net/Liturgies/Catholic/roman\\_missal/ordinarymass.htm](http://www.liturgies.net/Liturgies/Catholic/roman_missal/ordinarymass.htm).

of you and of our neighbor.” Here, we are reminded that love of God and love of others—worship and justice—cannot be separated, as together they form the fabric of the divine Law. While social justice references cannot be found in every Collect, they do occasionally appear and should be underscored, especially since the Collect introduces the tone and theme of the entire liturgy.

The Liturgy of the Word, the part of the Mass that extends from the readings through the Prayer of the Faithful, is often permeated with implications for the Church’s social mission. During this part of the Mass, we most clearly hear God’s call to live justly. In the Old Testament and New Testament readings alike, we learn about God’s justice and mercy and discover exhortations to continue the Lord’s mission and the work of social justice. The proclamation of the Gospel is of special importance: the gospels narrate the life of Christ and reveal to us how He had mercy on the sinner, welcomed the outcast, healed the sick, washed the feet of His disciples, and sacrificed Himself for the life of all. Having been fed by the Word of God, we are prompted to apply the message heard in Scripture to contemporary society and our individual lives. The homily helps the faithful in this process. Homilies should highlight social justice issues and incorporate Catholic social teaching when possible and fitting. While homilists should avoid becoming overly political, they should courageously speak the Truth and encourage their congregations to participate in the Church’s social mission. One of the major obstacles facing the progress of her social mission is that many lay people remain uneducated about Catholic social teaching. Homilies, while they should not be treated as lectures or information sessions, can help the average person in the pew grow in awareness about the principles of Catholic social teaching by explaining them in relationship to the day’s

readings. After the homily and the Creed, the faithful, as members of the common priesthood by their baptism, exercise their priestly office and offer their petitions to God during the General Intercessions, also referred to as the Universal Prayer or the Prayer of the Faithful. At least one of the petitions should be for the poor and suffering, those “burdened by any kind of difficulty.”<sup>255</sup> Specific and concrete petitions are to be valued. If a certain social justice issue is disrupting a given community, this should be brought before the Lord during the Universal Prayer. As a whole, the Liturgy of the Word is essential to understanding the connection between our Eucharistic celebrations and our social justice activities. In it, we remember Christ’s example, hear God’s call, and discern how to work for true justice.

Following the Liturgy of the Word, the Liturgy of the Eucharist begins with the preparation of the gifts. Along with the bread and wine, gifts or money for either the Church or the poor may be presented at this time.<sup>256</sup> Although our social justice actions do require the sacrifice of our time and talent, we are called to make financial sacrifices as well. The collection that is taken up at Mass provides us with an opportunity to do so. While bringing the collected money up to the altar with the gifts of bread and wine is not a universal gesture, it has significant meaning: “There is good foundation for the custom in some places of putting the collection baskets next to the altar: this practice expresses the connection between the Eucharist and care for the poor.”<sup>257</sup> Although the faithful—at least in the United States—no longer bring agricultural gifts, including bread and wine, from their households, their presentation of the money basket, bread, and wine from

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<sup>255</sup> *General Introduction of the Roman Missal*, 70.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>257</sup> Johannes H. Emminghaus, *The Eucharist: Essence, Form, Celebration* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1997), 166.

within the church “keeps the same spiritual efficacy and significance.”<sup>258</sup> The gifts of bread and wine symbolize our offering to God, our human labor, and our property.<sup>259</sup> They represent the sacrifices we make for social justice and our struggle for just wages, daily bread, housing, and the universal sharing of goods. When bread and wine, however, are only viewed as material substances to be given to God and be changed, the offertory’s deeper meaning is lost and the connection between the Eucharist and social justice is weakened:

Presenting our gifts of bread and wine is an action. On the level of empirical fact it is the contribution that each of us makes to nourish one another... In the liturgical context we ritualize the deeper meaning: our service to one another is what we give to God. But when the ritual meaning is literalized—when we simply give bread and wine to God—we forget what we are really doing, and the direction that liturgy gives to Christian living is distorted.<sup>260</sup>

In offering the gifts of bread and wine to God, we present to Him our service of others—all the ways we have tried to give of ourselves, to love the poor and excluded, and to share in their sufferings. We essentially give to Him our feeble and broken attempts to be like Him in the world. He accepts and receives our modest offerings, but He gives them back to us changed—completed and transformed into Himself—in order to nourish us and to strengthen our service of one another.

The idea of service can be found in the prayer over the offerings, following the preparation of the gifts. For example, the prayer for the Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time reads: “O Lord, we bring to your altar these offerings of our service.”<sup>261</sup> Here, service principally denotes worship of God, yet worship of God is always connected to love and

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<sup>258</sup> *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 73.

<sup>259</sup> Emminghaus, *The Eucharist: Essence, Form, Celebration*, 167. See also chapter 3.2 “Christ as Food Consumed” for a more detailed discussion of the symbolism of bread and wine.

<sup>260</sup> Dallen, “Liturgy and Justice For All,” 300.

<sup>261</sup> All prayer over the offerings excerpts taken from “Daily Roman Missal,” *The Liturgy Archive*, accessed May 1, 2014. [http://www.liturgies.net/Liturgies/Catholic/roman\\_missal/ordinarymass.htm](http://www.liturgies.net/Liturgies/Catholic/roman_missal/ordinarymass.htm).



service of neighbor. The prayer over the offerings on the Tenth Sunday of Ordinary Time expresses the desire for the Eucharistic offering to increase the Church's members' love of neighbor: "Look kindly upon our service, O Lord, we pray, that what we offer, may be an acceptable oblation to you and lead us to grow in charity." The prayer after Communion also can express the connection between the Eucharistic celebration and social justice. The prayer for the Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time involves an idea similar to that of the prayer over the offerings just presented: "We have partaken of the gifts of this sacred mystery, humbly imploring, O Lord, that what your Son commanded us to do in memory of him may bring us growth in charity." Doing what the Son commanded not only involves the Synoptic Gospels' idea of Eucharist, but also includes John's depiction: washing one another's feet. The prayer after Communion for the Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time asks that partaking in the Eucharist will help the Church to serve God through service of others: "Renewed by this bread from the heavenly table, we beseech you, Lord, that, being the food of charity, it may confirm our hearts and stir us to serve you in our neighbor."<sup>262</sup> This prayer expresses the belief that the face of the poor is the face of God—that God identifies with the poor—and that when we love the poor, we love God. Other prayers after Communion, such as that for the Fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time, include the themes of unity and mission: "O God, who have willed that we be partakers in the one Bread and the one Chalice, grant us, we pray, so to live that, made one in Christ, we may joyfully bear fruit for the salvation of the world." More explicitly yet, the prayer on the Twenty-Seventh Sunday of Ordinary Time reminds us of the idea—examined in detail in chapter four—that we become what we receive in

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<sup>262</sup> All prayer after Communion excerpts taken from "Daily Roman Missal," *The Liturgy Archive*, accessed May 1, 2014. [http://www.liturgies.net/Liturgies/Catholic/roman\\_missal/ordinarymass.htm](http://www.liturgies.net/Liturgies/Catholic/roman_missal/ordinarymass.htm).

the Eucharist: “Grant us, almighty God, that we may be refreshed and nourished by the Sacrament which we have received, so as to be transformed into what we consume.” We are transformed into the broken Body of Christ in order to give life to others. In both the prayer over the offerings and the prayer after Communion, we can discover glimpses of the Church’s prayer and desire for social justice—albeit not every week. In these, she acknowledges that her celebrations of the Eucharist profoundly affect how she lives in the world.

Finally, one can discern many social justice tenets within the Eucharistic prayer texts themselves. The themes of reconciliation, unity, and peace frequently appear. In the preface usually used with the Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation II, we acknowledge the divided state of humanity, the need for reconciliation, and how God transforms our human relationships:

For though the human race is divided by dissension and discord, yet we know that by testing us you change our hearts to prepare them for reconciliation. Even more, by your Spirit you move human hearts that enemies may speak to each other again, adversaries may join hands, and peoples seek to meet together. By the working of your power it comes about, O Lord, that hatred is overcome by love, revenge gives way to forgiveness, and discord is changed to mutual respect.<sup>263</sup>

Here, we praise and thank God for the healing—the restoration of right relationships—that He has effected within communities. In this same Eucharistic prayer’s intercessions, the role of the Holy Spirit in the Church’s social mission is highlighted and the Prayer of St. Francis is echoed, as we pray that the Father will send upon His people the “Spirit, who takes away everything that estranges us from one another. May he make your Church a sign of unity and an instrument of your peace among all people.”<sup>264</sup> The Spirit

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<sup>263</sup> “Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation II,” in *The Roman Missal* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Washington, DC: International Committee on English in the Liturgy, Inc., 2010.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*

removes divisions and enables peace to flourish, but—as discussed in chapter three—peace requires reconciliation. Eucharistic Prayer III expresses this idea: “May this sacrifice of our reconciliation, we pray, O Lord, advance the peace and salvation of all the world.”<sup>265</sup> Thus, our Eucharistic celebrations, in which we participate in Christ’s sacrifice that reconciled humanity to God and overcame the chasm between them, has consequences for the state of peace throughout the world. “All the world” is an example of the inclusive phrases found throughout many Eucharistic prayers. The preface of “The Church on the Path of Unity,” the first option for various needs, features the Church’s unity amidst her diversity and how the Church strengthens the unity of the entire human family. In the intercessions, we pray, “that in a world torn by strife your people may shine forth as a prophetic sign of unity and concord.”<sup>266</sup> This Eucharistic prayer underscores the lack of peace and justice on earth and points to the eschatological hope and the coming of the perfectly just Kingdom of God. In each Eucharistic prayer, we also pray that we will experience the joy of God’s Kingdom in Heaven upon death. This part of the Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation II is especially worth noting, as it has social justice undertones: “...bring us together, with those of every race and tongue who have died in your friendship. Bring us to share with them the unending banquet of unity in a new heaven and a new earth, where the fullness of your peace will shine forth in Christ Jesus our Lord.”<sup>267</sup> This intercession highlights eschatological expectation, peace, and unity within the diversified Communion of Saints. A somewhat similar request is found

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<sup>265</sup> “Eucharistic Prayer III,” in *The Roman Missal* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Washington, DC: International Committee on English in the Liturgy, Inc., 2010.

<sup>266</sup> “Eucharistic Prayer for Various Needs I: The Church on the Path of Unity,” in *The Roman Missal* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Washington, DC: International Committee on English in the Liturgy, Inc., 2010.

<sup>267</sup> Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation II,” in *The Roman Missal* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Washington, DC: International Committee on English in the Liturgy, Inc., 2010.

in the intercessions of Eucharistic Prayer II: “Remember, Lord, your Church, spread throughout the world, and bring her to the fullness of charity.”<sup>268</sup> Here, we acknowledge the diversity of the pilgrim Church. “Spread throughout the world,” she exists in the richest and poorest communities and thrives in developed and underdeveloped countries alike. While “the fullness of charity” is to be experienced fully in God’s Kingdom, the Church prays that God will lead her along the path of love—of charity—while she journeys on earth. This involves both loving God and loving others, including the poor and suffering in her midst.

Many Eucharistic prayers also directly reference the mission of each member of the Body of Christ to promote justice. In the intercessions of “God Guides His Church Along the Way of Salvation,” we pray that the entire Church, who lives among societies ravaged by suffering and sorrow, “may strive to bring joy and trust into the world.”<sup>269</sup> As explained in chapter four, the mission that the Eucharist bestows is eschatological in nature; all who partake in the meal are called to bring about the Kingdom of God in the here-and-now. This idea is expressed in the intercessions of the Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation I: “Help us to work together for the coming of your Kingdom until the hour when we stand before you.”<sup>270</sup> Working for social justice and building the Kingdom of God is the lifelong mission of every believer. As one Body, the Church must seek to make God’s reign a present reality and continue her social mission until Christ’s return.

An important aspect of the Church’s social mission involves imitating Christ by

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<sup>268</sup> “Eucharistic Prayer II” in *The Roman Missal* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Washington, DC: International Committee on English in the Liturgy, Inc., 2010.

<sup>269</sup> “Eucharistic Prayer for Various Needs II: God Guides His Church Along the Way of Salvation,” in *The Roman Missal* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Washington, DC: International Committee on English in the Liturgy, Inc., 2010.

<sup>270</sup> “Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation I,” in *The Roman Missal* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Washington, DC: International Committee on English in the Liturgy, Inc., 2010.

laying her life down for others. As His united Body, the Church is to exist in the world as a sacrifice and, thereby, make the world holy. In Eucharistic Prayer IV, we ask the Father to “grant in your loving kindness to all who partake of this one Bread and one Chalice that, gathered into one body by the Holy Spirit, they may truly become a living sacrifice in Christ.”<sup>271</sup> All who partake in the Eucharist are transformed into a sacrifice. The transformative character of the Eucharist is also emphasized in the intercessions of “Jesus, Way to Father”: “By our partaking of this mystery, give us life through your Spirit, grant that we may be conformed to the image of your Son.”<sup>272</sup> Consuming Christ’s Body and Blood, we become more like Him and take on the qualities that He displayed in His life, such as His identification with the poor and His compassion for the suffering.

Christ lived in solidarity with the least of these and we are called to do likewise. The Catholic social teaching principle of solidarity is clearly expressed in the intercessions of “Jesus, Way to the Father”: “Keep us attentive to the needs of all that, sharing their grief and pain, their joy and hope, we may faithfully bring them the good news of salvation and go forward with them along the way of your Kingdom.”<sup>273</sup> We pray that we will become more aware of the suffering of the entire world and that we will serve as a constant, consoling presence to those in need as messengers of God’s love. The intercessions of “Jesus Who Went About Doing Good” also ask the Father to make us aware of the suffering in the world and to help us tend to those in need in imitation of Christ: “Open our eyes to the needs of our brothers and sisters; inspire in us words and actions to comfort those who labor and are burdened. Make us serve them truly, after the

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<sup>271</sup> “Eucharistic Prayer IV” in *The Roman Missal* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Washington, DC: International Committee on English in the Liturgy, Inc., 2010.

<sup>272</sup> “Eucharistic Prayer for Various Needs III: Jesus, Way to Father,” in *The Roman Missal* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Washington, DC: International Committee on English in the Liturgy, Inc., 2010.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

example of Christ and at his command.”<sup>274</sup> As it asks God to guide both our words and deeds, this Eucharistic prayer demonstrates that evangelization and positive social action are closely related—a topic discussed in chapter four. In all that she does and says, the Church must “stand as a living witness to truth and freedom, to peace and justice that all people may be raised up to a new hope.”<sup>275</sup> Since she is to proclaim this to a world permeated by relativism, captivity, war, injustice, and despair, the counter-cultural Church prays that she will always remain firm—that she will “stand”—in the face of opposition.

In addition to petitioning God for help in carrying out her social mission, the Church also actively remembers and praises what God Himself has done for the least of these in her Eucharistic prayers. In the preface of “Jesus Who Went About Doing Good,” we recall the actions of Christ and His message of God’s universal care and mercy:

He always showed compassion for children and for the poor, for the sick and for sinners, and he became a neighbor to the oppressed and the afflicted. By word and deed he announced to the world that you are our Father and that you care for all your sons and daughters.<sup>276</sup>

Similarly, echoing Luke 4:18, we thank God for how Christ brought consolation to those in need in Eucharistic Prayer IV: “To the poor he proclaimed the good news of salvation, to prisoners, freedom, and to the sorrowful of heart, joy.”<sup>277</sup> Of course, the Institution Narrative is the central aspect of all the Eucharistic prayers. Christ’s sacrifice for the life of the world is what prompts, strengthens, and gives meaning to all our sacrifices for social justice and our service of others. In His sacrifice on the cross, Christ reconciled

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<sup>274</sup> “Eucharistic Prayer for Various Needs IV: Jesus Who Went About Doing Good,” in *The Roman Missal* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Washington, DC: International Committee on English in the Liturgy, Inc., 2010.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

<sup>277</sup> “Eucharistic Prayer IV” in *The Roman Missal* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Washington, DC: International Committee on English in the Liturgy, Inc., 2010.

and redeemed fallen humanity and, by doing so, enabled all to love one another. The Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation II expresses this: “When we ourselves had turned away from you on account of our sins, you brought us back to be reconciled, O Lord, so that, converted at last to you, we might love one another through your Son, whom for our sake you handed over to death.”<sup>278</sup> We love and serve one another because Christ loved and served us first.<sup>279</sup> The Eucharistic prayers demonstrate that the priority lies not with what we do for others, but with what God has done for us. In Eucharistic Prayer IV, we praise God for His creation, including His most prized creation: “You formed man in your own image.”<sup>280</sup> Here, we are reminded of the dignity of each human person, one of the chief principles of Catholic social teaching. One’s identity as a person created by God in His own image and likeness is the primary source of one’s dignity and is far more important than one’s race, ethnicity, or socio-economic status. All people are created in the image of the God who is loving, merciful, and compassionate—in the image of the God who is a servant. As a result, in the core of our hearts, we wish to be and do likewise. In the preface usually used with the Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation I, we praise and thank the Father for giving His people “hope in Christ Jesus and a desire to be of service to all.”<sup>281</sup> It is God who takes the initiative and instills within us a love for the poorest and weakest members of society.

*Lex orandi, lex credendi*: what we pray expresses what we believe. Throughout the whole Eucharistic liturgy, one can discover much about what the Church believes

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<sup>278</sup> “Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation II,” in *The Roman Missal* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Washington, DC: International Committee on English in the Liturgy, Inc., 2010.

<sup>279</sup> Cf. 1 John 4:19.

<sup>280</sup> “Eucharistic Prayer IV” in *The Roman Missal* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Washington, DC: International Committee on English in the Liturgy, Inc., 2010.

<sup>281</sup> Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation I,” in *The Roman Missal* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Washington, DC: International Committee on English in the Liturgy, Inc., 2010.

regarding social justice and her role in building a more just society. From the hymns that are sung and the readings that are proclaimed to the presentation of the gifts and the Eucharistic prayer texts themselves, the Mass is permeated by social justice themes, which cannot be willfully ignored. We pray for forgiveness for the ways we have failed to provide for the least among us in the Penitential Rite. Hearing about the works of God's mercy and love in the Liturgy of the Word, we are strengthened for our social mission and are encouraged to apply what we learn in Scripture to our daily lives. We offer to God our prayers for the poor and suffering in the Universal Prayer and present to Him our service of others and our sacrifices for justice in the gifts of bread and wine. In the various prayers throughout the Mass, including the Collect, the prayer over the offerings, the Eucharistic prayer, and the prayer after Communion, we make our requests known to God concerning many social justice themes, including unity, peace, reconciliation, solidarity, and service. As we remember what Christ did for the poor and participate in His sacrifice, we pray that we will continue His mission of love and mercy in imitation of Him—and this is precisely what we are sent forth from the Eucharist to do. In her greatest prayer, the Church receives the strength that sustains her social mission. In this her greatest act of worship, the Church also most clearly announces who she is to the world. According to the Council Fathers, the Eucharistic liturgy above all “is the chief means through which believers are expressing in their lives and demonstrating to others the mystery which is Christ, and the sort of entity the true church really is.”<sup>282</sup> If the Eucharist both manifests the Church's very identity and is infused with social justice themes, then the Mass reveals that the Catholic Church is a servant community who prioritizes care for the poor, upholds the dignity of every human person, and values

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<sup>282</sup> *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 2.



peace, mercy, and love. This is at the heart of who she is; this is who her Head created her to be.

## CHAPTER SIX: Conclusion

The Eucharist and social justice—worship of God and service of neighbor—go together and cannot be separated. Without the former, the latter becomes empty and loses perspective; without the latter, the former remains incomplete and an inauthentic celebration of Christ’s selfless sacrifice. Both the person who identifies his or her catholicity with daily attendance at Mass alone and the person who claims his or her daily work at the soup kitchen as the essential feature of his or her Catholicity are misguided in their estimation. Neither Sunday Mass nor caring for the needy is optional for those who claim to live as Catholic Christians in the world. The members of Christ’s Body are called to live in imitation of their Head, who both prayed to His Father in Heaven and ministered to the most ostracized—who both worshipped and served. By His Incarnation, Christ united love of God and love of neighbor. In the Eucharist, the Word made flesh continues to dwell among us,<sup>283</sup> and love of God and love of neighbor remain united.

The unity of worship and social justice is deeply rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition. The prophets of the Old Testament announced how God rejected sacrifices that were offered apart from actual care for the poor. In the New Testament, we read about how Christ identified with the poor and gave His disciples at the Last Supper the double command of celebrating a meal and washing one another’s feet in remembrance of Him—the two dimensions of Eucharist. In the early Church, concern for the poor was considered to be an essential aspect of celebrating the Lord’s Supper, as demonstrated by Paul’s rebuke of the Corinthians for allowing some members of the community to go hungry. Many Church Fathers such as John Chrysostom exhorted their congregations to recognize Christ’s presence in both the Eucharist and the poor person. Although attention

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<sup>283</sup> Cf. John 1:14.

has not always been given to the unity of the Eucharist and social justice throughout the liturgy's history, the fundamental relationship was never completely absent because social justice themes are woven into the very fabric of the Eucharist. Virgil Michel and other members of the Liturgical Movement worked to bring these to light and argued that the liturgy has tremendous relevance for the renovation of society.

The present research has examined the multiple ways that the Eucharist illuminates many social justice themes. Since all partake of the one bread and the one cup, the Eucharist demonstrates the unity of the Body of Christ and, by extension, the one human family. All are invited to sit at the table of the Lord. The principle of solidarity finds definite expression in the Eucharist, as the liturgy reminds us that we are a part of one another and that the sufferings of one member of the Body are shared in common by all. As a meal, the Eucharist upholds the importance of food and nourishment in the lives of all people. The offerings of bread and wine represent human life and labor.

Transforming the bread and wine into His Body and Blood, Christ gives Himself as food and drink to be consumed, so that all who receive Him may give of themselves as food to nourish others. The Eucharist announces the reign of God's justice, as the future complete coming of the Kingdom is remembered and experienced in the present.

Reconciliation and peace, two important aspects of social justice, are also highlighted in the Eucharistic celebration. As it makes present the sacrifice of Christ that reconciled God and humanity, the Eucharist demands exchanges of forgiveness, which leads to peace among people and communities. It also calls all who participate in the sacrifice of Christ to give of themselves totally and freely to others. Those who consume the Eucharist are transformed into the One who is received: Christ, the humble servant of the

poor. As the Body of Christ, the Church—fed by and nourished on her Head in the Eucharist—is sent forth to witness to the love of God and to serve. The mission that the Eucharist inaugurates is both evangelical and eschatological, as it includes proclaiming the hope of a better future and building the Kingdom of God as completely as possible in the present. The entire Eucharistic liturgy reveals these Eucharist-social justice connections, which ought to be never overlooked.

The temptation to ignore or dismiss the Eucharist’s connection to social justice is strong, especially for those of us who lead financially comfortable lives. What the Eucharist requires of us is difficult and challenges us to put aside our own desires and to interact with those whom we find it easier to pass by and overlook. We like to go to Mass, receive Communion, and then return to our daily lives, pretending as if nothing has changed—that we have not been changed. Yet, this is impossible! In the Eucharist, we encounter the God whose entrance into human history changed the world forever and who continues to change us as individuals and as a Church. The transformative event of meeting Christ in the Eucharist demands that our daily lives better reflect the life He lived and that we take on the virtues that He displayed—compassion, mercy, tenderness, forgiveness, love, and the like. We celebrate the Eucharist to live Eucharist—to live as Christ broken and poured out for the life of the world. In this sense, the Eucharistic liturgy is perpetuated in our daily lives. Our service of the poor and suffering begins and ends in the Eucharistic liturgy, the center of the Church’s entire life and mission. We begin with the Eucharist in order to be transformed, strengthened, and sent forth for the work of social justice; we return to the Eucharist to continue this process. Yet, we also return to the Eucharist—from the Greek *eucharistia*, “thanksgiving”—to give thanks. We

thank God for the many gifts He never ceases to give and we offer Him thanks for the work He began in Christ and now continues through us, His Church. In the Eucharist, we give thanks for the manifold ways that He is working to transform society into His Kingdom, to comfort the lonely, to feed the hungry, to welcome the stranger, and to clothe the naked. Social justice successes do not belong to us, but to God alone. It is He who supports our efforts, guides our activities, and effects change. The Eucharistic liturgy, where we encounter the living God and become whom we receive, makes this reality known.

Our celebrations of the Eucharist must not remain locked within the church's four walls. For the sake of the poor and the suffering throughout the world, the Eucharist's implications for the Church's social mission must come into the forefront of ecclesial conversations. Her members need to know that their participation in Mass lacks the fullness of meaning if they do not engage in some form of service of the least of these. Fortunately, it seems that awareness of the intimate relationship between the Eucharist and social justice is slowly growing, thanks in part to the insistent example of Pope Francis. His first two celebrations of Holy Thursday, the day on which the Church celebrates the institution of the Eucharist, have not gone unnoticed by the Catholic faithful or by the mainstream media. In 2013, he washed the feet of prisoners, including females and Muslims; in 2014, he knelt at the feet of the elderly and people with disabilities. During one of Francis's general audiences, he posed a series of questions, prompting reflection on how each one of us as individual believers in the Church lives Eucharist in daily life:

But the Eucharist which I celebrate, does it lead me to truly feel they are all like brothers and sisters? Does it increase my capacity to rejoice with those who are

rejoicing and cry with those who are crying? Does it urge me to go out to the poor, the sick, the marginalized? Does it help me to recognize in theirs the face of Jesus? We all go to Mass because we love Jesus and we want to share, through the Eucharist, in his passion and his resurrection. But do we love, as Jesus wishes, those brothers and sisters who are the most needy?<sup>284</sup>

Francis offers three indicators that we are living Eucharist well: we see and relate to others as Christ did, we recognize our need to forgive and be forgiven, and we uphold the unity of liturgy and life in our Christian communities. Francis's words about how our celebrations of the Eucharist must shape our daily lives as Christians are continually reinforced by the many images depicting his personal love for the least of these that flood social media: embracing the child with cerebral palsy, kissing the head of the disfigured man, gazing into the elderly woman's eyes, celebrating Mass among migrants on the island of Lampedusa. These images, which often induce an emotional response, must lead to action in our daily lives as well. The Holy Father is certainly calling each and every member of the Church to work for social justice; it is a responsibility that we share together as one servant Church.

Although the relationship between the Eucharist and social justice is slowly garnering more attention, much work remains to be done. Here, I propose several specific recommendations that I believe will help to overcome the division between the Eucharist and social justice. It is my hope that these practical and realistic suggestions, which are primarily directed at the parish level, will help average Catholics in the pew to embrace the mission that their participation in the Eucharist demands.

First, while neither social justice action nor liturgical planning can be reduced to the work of a committee, a parish's service organization and liturgy advisory board must

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<sup>284</sup> Pope Francis, "General Audience, February 12, 2014," *Vatican*, last modified February 12, 2014, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2014/documents/papa-francesco\\_20140212\\_udienza-generale.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20140212_udienza-generale.html).

communicate and cooperate. Just as there cannot be divisions within the Church as a whole, there cannot be separate camps within a parish—one concerned with social justice and one with the liturgy. These committees must regularly meet together and should appoint someone to serve as a liaison between the two groups. Since they share many goals in common, they should undertake projects and plan events together. Their joint efforts help set the tone for the way that the entire parish understands the relationship between the Eucharistic liturgy and social justice.

Second, parishes must institute and provide more consistent opportunities for parishioners to concretely engage in service of the poor and suffering. One reason for the lack of participation in the work of social justice on the part of many Catholics is that they do not know where or how to begin. Parishes should have a regular schedule of social justice activities, just as they have a regular Mass schedule and offer many opportunities for communal and personal prayer outside the Mass. The range of opportunities is very broad and all parishes, regardless of their own financial circumstances, can organize some form of social justice action: food, clothing, and blanket drives; coordinated visits to nursing homes, soup kitchens, prisons, and shelters; the creation and distribution of hygiene kits to homeless men and women; domestic or international mission trips, to name a few. Service opportunities that parishes make available should also welcome those of all ages. Many parishes have a chapter of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, but members tend to be older and the organization may not appeal to younger parishioners as a result. Yet, the work of social justice, like the Eucharistic celebration itself, belongs to all members of the Church.

Third, the close relationship between the Eucharist and service of others should be learned at a young age. Parish faith formation programs will be critical in ensuring that this happens by presenting the fullness of the Eucharist's meaning. When children are preparing to receive First Communion, they should learn about the dual meaning of Eucharist: celebrating the memorial of the Lord's Supper and washing the feet of others. This should never be at the expense of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharistic species, but a more balanced approach should be taken, one that gives due recognition to Christ's true presence in the least of these. The RCIA process and any adult faith formation classes should also highlight the Lord's double dominical command.

Fourth, our required service of the poor must be continually emphasized and echoed in every area of parish life. It cannot be a subject that is only discussed at certain times of the year such as when the Christmas giving trees reemerge or during the annual Catholic Charities appeal. Parish councils should occasionally brainstorm how to improve the parish's overall service of the poor and suffering. Pastors should write sporadically about the Eucharist's missionary dimension and our social justice responsibility in their bulletin column. Dynamic presentations and inspiring resources that educate the faithful about the relationship between the Eucharist and social justice should also be made available. Bible study groups could spend a semester examining the relationship between worship and justice in Scripture. Youth groups could make attending Mass and service to the poor chief components of their gatherings. Parishes could also have the occasional Holy Hour to pray for an end to hunger and homelessness. This is important, as it is a reminder that prayer must accompany our social justice activities; prayer—especially Eucharistic—is what ultimately propels social justice



efforts and has the power to transform situations. Of course, as noted in chapter five, liturgical musicians should incorporate selections that reflect the Eucharist's connection to service of neighbor, homilists should exhort congregations to actively participate in social justice action, and the Prayer of the Faithful should explicitly articulate the parish's obligation to serve the poor and suffering.

Fifth, partnerships should develop between churches in communities in radically different socio-economic circumstances. For example, a parish in affluent Greenwich, CT, could develop a relationship with a parish in impoverished Ecuador, and a parish in wealthy Cherry Hill, NJ, could get to know its neighboring parish in Camden. Pastors and parishioners of each parish could share pictures and stories of their joys, struggles, and liturgical celebrations with those in the other parish. In this way, a real sense of community and the unity of the Body of Christ would be experienced. Personal connections motivate social justice efforts and members of wealthier parishes would be more inspired to give and do more for their suffering brothers and sisters whose names they now know, thanks to the parish partnership.

These recommendations, which are only the beginning of reasserting the relationship between the Eucharist and social justice, require the full participation and cooperation of the entire parish. Pastors and parishioners must communicate their visions and share their ideas. Each member of the Church, regardless of age, state of life, or personal circumstance, is to make use of his or her specific gifts and contribute to the mission that the Eucharist bestows. The poor and suffering throughout the world and those in our own communities are relying on us: we the Church, who profess faith in the One who identified with the poor, who listen to His Word, and who partake in His Body

and Blood broken and poured out for the life of the world. They can wait no longer. At every Eucharistic celebration, Christ is urging us toward them and calling us to action. Now is time to *overcome the division* between the Eucharist and social justice.

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