

2005

Eating, Drinking, Sending: Reflections on the Juxtaposition of Law and Event in the Eucharist

Dirk G. Lange

Luther Seminary, dlange001@luthersem.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.luthersem.edu/faculty_articles

 Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), [Liturgy and Worship Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Lange, Dirk G., "Eating, Drinking, Sending: Reflections on the Juxtaposition of Law and Event in the Eucharist" (2005). *Faculty Publications*. 245.

http://digitalcommons.luthersem.edu/faculty_articles/245

Published Citation

Lange, Dirk G. "Eating, Drinking, Sending: Reflections on the Juxtaposition of Law and Event in the Eucharist." In *Ordo: Bath, Word, Prayer, Table: A Liturgical Primer in Honor of Gordon W. Lathrop*, edited by Dwight. Vogel, Edward Schillebeeckx, and Gordon. Lathrop, 84–99. Akron, OH: OSL Publications, 2005.

SIX

Eating, Drinking, Sending: Reflections on the Juxtaposition of Law and Event in the Eucharist

Dirk G. Lange

EUCHARIST AND LAW

If we ask the “what” question – “What is the eucharist!?” – we will be tempted to return to its origin. We will want to know what really happened and, if possible, we will want to “see,” re-enact, re-live the scene as in a movie. But through which lens are we going to view the scene? Through the passion? Through the resurrection? Through a notion of sacramentality? Through Aristotelian metaphysics? Through sacrifice or perhaps through testament? Through memorial or *anamnesis*? Perhaps through the Word? No matter how forcefully we state our argument, every approach applies a hermeneutic to the eucharist.

Listen to Luther. Is he not making a different proposal?

Christ, in order to prepare for himself an acceptable and beloved people, which should be bound together in unity through love, abolished the whole law of Moses. And that he might not give further occasion for divisions and sects, he appointed in return but one law or order for his entire people, and that was the holy mass. . . Henceforth, therefore, there is to be no other external order for the service of God except the mass.²

When Luther writes these words in the “Treatise on the New Testament,” is he not proposing that a hermeneutic arises *out* of the event called the eucharist? Isn’t Luther proposing that believers relate to life – their lives, the lives of their “neighbor” (in the meaning given that term by the parable of the

Good Samaritan), their cosmology – through the “event” called the eucharist rather than the other way around?

The strange and unexpected irruption of the word “one law” (or order) in this passage will guide our reflection towards an ecumenical hermeneutic – towards a “unity through love.” Why would Luther employ a word, or play with a word that he normally sets in juxtaposition to Gospel? We associate the notion of law with the ordering of society and the maintenance of balance between the rights of individuals and the collective interest. We understand law as a system, even a symbol, which represents, protects, and when invoked, re-enacts the rights of people. Why would Luther equate the heart of the Gospel with law? How are we to understand the grammatical peculiarity of this phrase: “one law or order for his entire people, and that was the holy mass”? Could Luther actually intend the eucharist to be the “one” absolute law?

In light of Luther’s reticence towards legalism in any form and particularly within the context of worship, we need to answer with a resounding: No! It would be better to reformulate our question: isn’t it the “law,” when set side by side with the eucharist, that is disrupted? The intrusiveness of the word “law” in this passage yields, I believe, an initial hermeneutical insight: yes, “law” itself is profoundly destabilized or displaced by a liturgical act. The “law” is not imposed upon the event – the eucharist is not compared to a law - rather, the event – the eucharistic event – interprets the notion of “law.”

Prosper of Aquitaine’s coupling of “law” and liturgical practice in the well-known aphorism *lex orandi, lex credendi*³ is an appeal not to a universally imposed practice or law but to a law of begging,⁴ a law of supplication, an appeal to unceasing prayer. The need of all humanity before God is itself a continual prayer and, for Prosper, this prayer – this need both silent and spoken – is expressed through liturgical practice.⁵ The appeal to unceasing prayer, to the condition of needy humanity as the “law” of liturgical practice implicitly acknowledges a foundation that does not rest in any institutional church, in any Magisterium, even in any liturgical tradition. The “law’s” foundation is not the solid, unambiguous certainty of a mystical origin that proclaims eternal truths, that insists on absolute values, appeals to universal principles, that unfailingly distinguishes between right and wrong but, in the words of Psalm 42, the foundation is “deep calling to deep” – strangely, oddly, deeply abyss, need, hole. The “law’s” foundation is in humanity’s need.

When Luther interprets the “law” through the eucharistic event, he is disrupting our uncritically held notion of “law.” As it is classically understood, the law is the imposition of a universal to maintain order and justified by an appeal to a foundation – a mythic, idolized, even mystic foundation. In other

words, the law's foundation is non-negotiable, beyond criticism and questioning.⁶ However, when the foundation is not a mystic origin or a transcendental source but humanity's need of grace expressed through liturgical practice, then both law and its foundation are shaken. By displacing the law and its foundation through liturgical practice – specifically the act we call the eucharist – the law itself is awakened to its characteristic not as absolute but as invention. Through its displacement by the eucharistic event, the “one law” questions its own “origin” – it is called to recognize the deep, the abyss, the hole; it is called to *respond* to that need; it is called to responsibility.

Luther's intention is now clear: by placing “law” and “eucharist” together in one phrase, he places intense pressure on the term “law.” Luther contrasts the “one law” that is the eucharist with the old Law of Moses. In other words, the “one law” is contrasted with that older law that has constituted for itself a mystical foundation. The “one law” that is the eucharist displaces the “law” which posits its origins in an absolute authority, in a mystical (or divine) source. The eucharist is the “*one* law,” the only law – it is not “a” law but rather the one law that effectively ends the mystical character of all law. Luther is questioning, displacing, deconstructing the violent imposition of a “law” in order to reach the profound “unity through love” for the entire people. The “one law” that is the eucharist challenges all our conceptions of law by interrupting, irrupting, awakening the participant – by awakening us – from the realm of mystical foundations, absolute origins, eternal testaments, perfect memorial. It thereby challenges the very framework of current ecumenical and intra-denominational debate on the “meaning” or theological significance of the eucharist.

In stating that the holy mass or eucharist is the “one law” for the entire people, Luther disrupts the notion of law by displacing its “origin.” A liturgical act – the eucharistic event – breaks open the mystical origins of the law. Or, put another way, when we say that Jesus Christ is Gospel – new law – the mystical foundation of all law and religion is challenged. Of course, for Luther, Jesus is God but not the God of mystical origins and absolute heights. Jesus is God in the manger and on the cross. In other words, when we run to God we do not run to the law (or ascend to its mystical origins) but we run to the manger and the cross. We run – dare I interpret it in this way – we run to the singularity of an event.

EUCHARIST AS EVENT

This chapter began with the question “what is the eucharist?” only to discover that it is unanswerable. Instead, we were led along a path of displacement of meanings. In light of those displacements, we can now reformulate the question and begin again by asking: How do we remember an event?

This question in itself already presupposes a historical perspective for, in order to ask the question, something necessarily occurred. But why do we look back as if the event – call it the Last Supper for example – could be localized historically? This looking back defines the event as an ending rather than as a beginning, as something resolved, as something that we keep as a memorial, rather than something calling us, something ever irrupting, even haunting us. The return of a singular event, the continual irruption of that event in our lives is here opposed to simple imitation and memorial. Something in the event – its singularity – cannot be captured by our memories, by any act of *mimesis*, imitation or remembrance. This singularity continually returns or irrupts into the ordered patterns of our lives disseminating principles, rules, laws, foundations, even reference points of faith. The dynamics of liturgical repetition focus on this singularity. The singularity is repeated, continually repeated, precisely because it cannot be captured or truly remembered. The repetition itself points to an incompleteness in the event. Returning to the opening question of this section, we are called to look for something incomplete, perhaps disseminated and which cannot therefore be totally remembered.

We are confronted then by a second question: what constitutes, in the event, the singularity that resists capture or remembering? Michel de Certeau writes, “An event is not what can be seen or known about its happening, but what it becomes (and, above all, for us).”⁷ He is writing about an event (the revolution of May 1968 in France) that had been witnessed and that had, as its own testimony, the chronicles of innumerable newspapers. Yet, a sensory and intellectual/emotive conceptualization does not constitute the event. The event is in its becoming, in its coming to be, and, parenthetically, in a continual and non-exhaustive “coming to be” through the limitless us. In other words, the singularity of the event opposes the facile historical perspective as it opposes the facile theological positing of an origin or mystical foundation as if these could be explanatory. The singularity of the event cannot be remembered by a memorial act or idealistically construed liturgies or correctly defined sacraments or even broad ecumenical consensus – for all of these are only attempts to capture the event.

This singularity as *resistance to remembering* eludes capture by sight or knowledge but it offers also more than just a cognitive resistance: it engages body and soul. The resistance to facile remembering is first of all a dis-membering of our own identity, of our own life and knowledge, of our own body and blood and that of our neighbor. The event irrupts through continual displacements.

The radical singularity of the event has been relegated to a corner by traditional eucharistic theology and practice. Yes, an event is placed at center stage – the Last Supper (for example, Luke 22) – however, traditional eucharistic theology establishes this event as origin. By placing a theological emphasis on origin, the eucharistic celebration receives a new mystical foundation. The eucharistic

Ordo: Bath, Word, Prayer, Table

celebration itself becomes “law” rather than that which interprets and displaces law. In this worst-case scenario, the eucharist becomes a law dictating our ritual remembering and repetition as if through ritual remembering we had ever-renewed access to the mystical or divine foundation – to some special communication of grace. In this scenario, only the (usually male) presider regulates access to the event and the meaning of the event is controlled through faithful observance and imitation of the law. This is not what Luther proposed when he wrote that the “one law” inspires unity through love.

Again, in traditional eucharistic theology, the basic components of liturgical practice are not hotly contested. An event happened – traditionally called the Last Supper. “High” liturgical traditions (those emphasizing shape or pattern) have approached this event through the sacraments: *anamnesis* is an enacted remembering of the event. So-called lower liturgical traditions (those suggesting that the liturgy is much more amorphous) will memorialize the event and consider their “remembering” as an act of public allegiance, a token of their faith. In either case, a previous occurrence (or event) in salvation history (the Last Supper, proclamation of the Good News, gift of the Spirit) is remembered or appropriated by a current/present act. The repetitive ritual act is, in itself, a “communication” of the event.⁸ Either of these traditional liturgical approaches to the event enact the ritual as if the event to be remembered and enacted or communicated were already known, as if the outcome were always the same.

A first-century church document illustrates Luther’s point. The *Didache*⁹ questions this definition of liturgical or ritual repetition. It offers an example of displacement, of a profound resistance to the efforts of memory to capture the event and define speech. In Chapters 9 and 10, there is the description of a eucharistic celebration.¹⁰ These chapters are now dated around 50 CE which would mean they predate the written Gospel accounts and are probably coterminous with the oral tradition of Matthew’s Gospel and Paul’s preaching.¹¹ Two things are absent from this account of the celebration of the eucharist: the Words of Institution¹² and any explicit reference to the cross – to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. These two missing references unsettle our assumptions: is the “what” of our memorial, the “what” of our ritual action, the “what” of our “event” no longer so clearly definable? Here is an early Christian community, in fact probably one of the earliest of which we have a record, celebrating the central liturgical rite of the eucharist but not remembering Jesus’ presence either by means of the Last Supper or of the cross. What and how does this community remember Christ?

The *Didache* disrupts our remembering and it does so at that critical moment in the liturgy when we think we are the closest to remembering. For when we celebrate eucharist, we use the words that

Jesus used – the Words of Institution – the words that have become like a watchword for the eucharist. In the past, when the Words of Institution were absent, scholars even dismissed the liturgical witness as non-eucharistic (which was the fate of the *Didache* for several decades).¹³ Repeating the Words of Institution provides the illusion that we are repeating something that Jesus did, something Jesus instituted, something Jesus founded. We cannot repeat the cross every Sunday but we can repeat this meal and thereby “remember” the Passion. But the *Didache* pulls the rug out from under us. It questions our historical, institutional, ritual remembering of an event by questioning our understanding of that event. What then is actually “remembered” in the eucharist? Is it only one meal, only the Last Supper?

When remembering becomes too narrowly focused, the prophet Isaiah’s cry is heard again: “Do not remember the former things or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” (Isaiah 43:16-21). In this prophecy, God first reminds the people of their flight from Egypt, their redemption through the dry passage of the Red Sea. But then God immediately tells the people *not to remember*, in other words, to dis-remember. If the people try blindly to remember in their ritual and their meal-sharing the passage through the Red Sea, they cannot recognize the passage God prepares today, now. If our own ritual remembering in the eucharist concentrates too heavily on one event, we too risk not seeing what new thing springs forth today. We too risk falling asleep through our ritual remembering rather than being reoriented to God’s activity and call in the world now.

By its silence on the Last Supper and even on cross and resurrection symbolism, the *Didache* disseminates liturgical “remembering.” The *Didache* points toward not one account of the meal, but to the meal-sharing tradition that Jesus practiced. Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God through his table fellowship, through the ancient ritual action of a meal. This act of “open commensality”¹⁴ radically disoriented and reoriented the participants in relation to their accepted cosmology.¹⁵ When we look at the meal event in the gospels, we notice something peculiar: Jesus was breaking every ritual norm when he celebrated a meal. He would eat with those deemed unworthy (or ritually unclean) and when he ate with “religious folk” he always introduced an element to unsettle the ritual purity of the event (Matthew 9:9-13; Luke 7:36-50; Luke 19:1-10). Whatever Jesus’ intent in the unexpected pattern of these meal events, one thing is clear: the meal sharing became, already in the Gospels, a liturgical act that pointed away from itself as liturgical act and towards a responsibility. The meal event as celebrated by Jesus was so radically new and different (displacing), so radically life-giving in its displacement, that the sharing of bread and wine became the central act by which early Christians repeated that displacement, repeated that reversal, repeated that which could not be captured.

Ordo: Bath, Word, Prayer, Table

Liturgical repetition, then, is not the remembering of one event but the displacement – the disruption – of all forms of remembering; it is the disorientation and reorientation of this radical commensality. The *Didache*, and of course the Gospels, stand as our witnesses. Disorientation and reorientation are irruptions of the singularity of the event into our daily lives. Remembering is not ‘looking back’ or ‘calling to mind,’ but the displacement of our lives so that the event can “become for us” (de Certeau).

We do not know how the eucharist “became” for the community of the *Didache*. We do have, however, a witness in the structure of this text: the meal sharing practice finds expression in a particular relation to the world, to the community, to strangers, and to the poor. The concluding chapters of the *Didache* reorient the notion of hierarchy in the community and propose a radical generosity, a strong welcome and an equally strong discernment.

The literary form of the *Didache* further underlines this displacement and resistance to memory. For example, Jesus is not the grammatical center of this liturgical text. In fact, the name of Jesus itself is disseminated in the text. The cup and the bread (the promise) do not refer directly to Jesus but come to us through (*dia*) Jesus. The emphasis is not as much on the person of Jesus and what Jesus did as it is on the promise of God – the promise of life, knowledge, Spirit, reconciliation – that comes to us *through* Jesus. This is in sharp contrast to later canonical literature (particularly in the Words of Institution) in which Jesus is the primary referent. In the Johannine writings, Jesus becomes the vine and the community the branches. The name of Jesus is imposed through direct reference and speech: “I am the vine, you are the branches.” (John 15:5). The need for a direct, clear reference, the need to capture the event in the “I am” or the “This is my body...” overpowers the call to disorientation, displacement, and reorientation. The eucharistic witness of the *Didache* orients the reader (the participant), not to a single referent, not to a single name, not to an imposition, not to a “law” (and its mystical foundation), but to a radical inter-relationality (see again the call to live as community in and through the sharing of all things, material and spiritual in the concluding chapters of the *Didache*). The dissemination of the referent and the subsequent displacement of the participant is perhaps the irruption of a singularity, the event, or the irruption of a series of related events (a meal gathering by Jesus).

The witness of the *Didache* to the meal event that Jesus practiced is a witness to something that cannot be remembered. Sacramental remembering is displaced. Remembering and repetition are not supplying us with the source or origin or foundation, perhaps not even with the event. The eucharist is therefore not the imitation or mere repetition or simple memorial or even *anamnesis* of the final meal

of Jesus but a testament to the continual displacement initiated by Jesus. Liturgical repetition is then the opposite of imitation, for imitation would repeat a closed, self-containing event, a direct referent. Liturgical repetition, however, enacts the dissemination that always breaks itself open, that always displaces itself. In this sense, liturgical repetition is always already an anti-liturgy. The eucharist is the reminder that Jesus died (was broken, fragmented, displaced, disseminated) “for our sins” but it is also a radical reminder that all our liturgical and perhaps especially our sacramental practices point away from any easy meaning we would attribute to them. Meaning itself is in fact disseminated, sent out through the door as many broken pieces of bread.

The eucharistic meal in the *Didache* suggests that performative ritual embodies the irruption of an event – or the awakening to the impossibility of capturing the event *per se*. This awakening is an awakening to the continual call of the event to displace those who participate in it. The irruption does not reduce the eucharistic event to a historical fact or moment, nor does it send us off into the unfathomable grounds of a mystical foundation. The irruption through liturgical repetition expresses the disseminated nature of the event: not only is the bread broken, disseminated, but the “utterer” (the presider) is also disseminated, scattered in plural, grammatical forms. This dissemination is an unsettling experience, an experience the participant (presider included) would prefer controlling. The eucharistic event, however, resists capture, resists falling asleep – it constantly calls us to life.¹⁶

The eucharistic prayer in the *Didache* concludes with beseeching: “So may your church be gathered” Even in the rite, the gathering, the “unifying” is not completed. A prayer for completion is added. Another disorientation has occurred, this time from thanksgiving to pleading. The repetition of the meal has brought back the dissemination, not as a negative incapacity but as hope. The remembering has pointed not towards a completed event but something absent, a hole, an abyss, something still becoming “for us” and continually questioning us.

HERMENEUTICS OF EVENT

Let us return to the two main points before moving on to the third. By equating the “one law” and eucharist, Luther has displaced the origin and foundation of the law. The law – no law – gives us access to the singularity of an event. Rather, the law is itself displaced and re-interpreted through reference to an event. Denying us access to immutable, transcendental, mystical truth and origin, Luther directs us to the singularity of an event – the Christ event. That event disrupts our remembering. We are confronted by an event that cannot be remembered. The liturgical practice of the *Didache* embodies this

Ordo: Bath, Word, Prayer, Table

confrontation by focusing on the radical disorientation and reorientation of the meal-keeping practice of Jesus. Liturgical repetition is the repetition not of a memorial but of a continual displacement.

Leader, people, things and world are displaced in liturgical celebration by the impossibility of capturing, imitating and remembering an event and the recognition of the inadequacy of any form, whether old or new, to express that singularity. This impossibility and this displacement – this time and space – witness to a profound dissemination of meaning. Dissemination (the impossibility of capture) is threatening for high liturgical proponents (because it denies any universal validity to a set *ordo*) as well as low liturgical advocates or free church advocates or mega-church advocates (because it denies universal validity to any method created or contrived for conversion and sanctification). In order to approach this dissemination, we will again turn to Luther. Here, Luther provides an insight into his theological method, a method deeply rooted in a biblical pattern:

But what could the devil not do? . . . He had some of his followers in the Christians' schools, and through them he stealthily sneaked and crept into the holy Scriptures. Once he had wormed his way in and had things under control, he burst out on all sides, creating a real brawl over Scripture and producing many sects, heresies, and factions among Christians. Since every faction claimed Scripture for itself and interpreted it according to its own understanding, the result was that Scripture began to lose its worth, and eventually even acquired the reputation of being a heretics' book?? and the source of all heresy, since all heretics seek the aid of Scripture. Thus the devil was able to wrest from the Christians their weapons, armor, and fortress (i.e. Scripture), so that it not only became feeble and ineffective against him, but even had to fight against the Christians themselves. He got Christians to become suspicious of it, as if it were plain poison against which they had to defend themselves. Tell me, wasn't that a clever scheme of the devil? . . . This is the way the plot worked out for the fathers: Since they contrived to have the Scriptures without quarreling and dissension, they thereby became the cause of men's turning wholly and completely away from the Scriptures to mere human drivel. Then, of course, dissension and contention over the Scriptures necessarily ceased, which is a divine quarrel wherein God contends with the devil, as St. Paul says in Ephesians 6[:12], "We have to contend not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual wickedness in the air." But in place of this, there has broken out human dissension over temporal honor and goods on earth, yet there remain a united blindness and ignorance of the Scriptures and a loss of the true Christian faith Isn't this also a piece of devilish craftiness? No matter what play we make, the devil is a master and an expert at the game.¹⁷

Luther's synopsis of the history of the interpretation of Scripture and the devil's role in it reveals a fundamental hermeneutical insight. If we were to rephrase Luther, we might hear him say, "The devil creeps into the Scriptures through the different schools and gets each school to argue for one – its own – interpretation of Scripture. What results are heresies: everyone begins to interpret the Scripture in their own way. And even worse, the Scriptures themselves, become the Christians own worst enemy. Then the church fathers and bishops come along and decide to put an end to all the bickering. They impose one authoritative interpretation, sanctioned by Rome, through the church councils and imposed by the laws of the lands. This is exactly what the devil wanted because this then blinds Christians to the incredible tension, the juxtapositions which are the pattern of the Scriptures."

This passage is revelatory not only of Luther's struggle to free Scripture from the constraints of a monopolistic interpretation but it is also suggestive of his eucharistic hermeneutic. When this passage is placed next to our opening citation (God "appointed in return but one law or order for his entire people, and that was the holy mass"), we will better understand the displacement of the notion of law and its reorientation in the eucharist. In the opening citation, the eucharist is named the "one law" which responds to the many occasions of "divisions and sects." In the second passage, one authoritative interpretation opposes (suppresses) the many divisive, sectarian interpretations of Scripture. Luther interprets the force of opposition in the second citation as a negative move. The one authoritative interpretation is an imposition, a violence. The suppression of voices in the second passage destroys the biblical pattern. On the other hand, the potentially negative "one law" in the first passage is broken open through association with the eucharistic celebration. In other words, the eucharist, rather than imposing itself like one law or order, patterns for the participants (for us), a continual dissemination, a continual displacement and reorientation.

Is it then possible, when the eucharist is considered as an event always breaking open our rituals, always pointing towards an abyss, an absence, always displacing and disseminating, is it possible to discern a hermeneutics? Or is this just another antinomy? Can a hermeneutics of displacement be a true hermeneutic? In a strange way, I will say, yes. This dissemination, this continual displacement and reorientation, is the pattern of the liturgy itself. It is the pattern that Justin invokes when he invites us into the pattern of those good things.¹⁸ This dissemination – the "one law"! – is not a negative move (that of simply scattering, dying) but a pattern yielding an approach to meaning.

We have another term for this pattern that the eucharist embodies for the entire people: the means of grace. The means of grace clearly focuses this pattern – yes, on the sacramental gifts of bread and wine and water, but even more importantly on the promise these hold. "Jesus Christ is the living

Ordo: Bath, Word, Prayer, Table

and abiding Word of God. By the powers of the Spirit, this very Word of God, which is Jesus Christ, is read in the Scriptures, proclaimed in preaching, announced in the forgiveness of sins, eaten and drunk in the Holy Communion and encountered in the bodily presence of the Christian community.”¹⁹ The “one law,” the pattern that is the eucharist, invites believers into the simple acts of reading, proclaiming, announcing, eating and drinking, encountering... the Gospel. The “one law” invites into – it gathers the people in – just as the “one law” disseminates at the same time all referents, all foundations, all laws.

The “one law” invites into a pattern and a hermeneutic emerges – a hermeneutic of event. The sharing of bread and wine, the sharing in the body and blood of Christ is all this: reading, proclaiming, announcing, eating and drinking, encountering and we could add bathing and teaching as well. The “one law,” the juxtaposition embedded in the eucharistic event itself does not defer to a mystical foundation but takes us to the crux of a sacramental and even more generally a liturgical theology. The sacramental act is not the bridging of the gap between the sacred and the secular – it is not our peephole into God’s reality or our high-speed internet connection to God or any form of privileged communication – it is the encounter of God’s grace through and in creation’s need. In that encounter, human need is reoriented. The “one law” witnesses to the displacement of the mystical foundation – to the displacement of God in vulnerability, need, suffering. The hermeneutic of event – of the “one law” – disseminates and juxtaposes rather than systematizing and concluding. The hermeneutic of the “one law” points to the hole, the abyss in which the “promise” can be truly promise, truly testament. The “one law” that is the eucharist is then a profound “unity through love.”²⁰

The one law or order awakens from the slumber of mystical origins to reveal itself as the juxtaposition, the crux, the confrontation, the dynamic embedded within the eucharist. This law or order takes us to the cross. The means of grace²¹ then is nothing less than the way to the cross – through the water and the word, we are brought back to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, to a communion in the paschal mystery; through the bread and the wine and the word, we are brought back to the body and blood of Jesus Christ, to his life offered to each one of us.²²

But is this not in contradiction to the earlier statement that the means of grace confounds our very method of thinking and remembering? What does it mean to go to the cross? Are we again idealistically remembering that past event as if we were all gifted with liturgical *hypermnnesia*?²³ Are we somehow miraculously taken back to the crucifixion as in a film? Does the means of grace accomplish this sort of magical time-machine?

We want to believe that we are able to remember the cross; for example, there are moments in life when we are imbued with a strong emotional response to the cross and are overwhelmed that Jesus died “for me.” Our emotions, our memories take us back... Or we fall back in on ourselves, as happens in many parishes today that do not keep up the incessant and necessary dialogue and critique of culture: “This is the way we’ve always done it!” In uncertainty and insecurity we return to what is known to us, what we remember as being the most vital: “This is how we enact our faith!” – “This is how we remember Jesus!” – “This is how we worship!” Or, on another level, we get excited about a film like the “The Passion of the Christ” that shows it all “as it really was”! Worship would then have to compete with this film. In any of these scenarios, worship patterns are simply attempts to remember and our liturgies become trapped by the different forms of remembering that we have constructed.

In response to these attempts at remembering, the one law speaks a resounding No! The one law confronts us with the impossibility of remembering, with the impossibility of imitating. The one law that is the eucharist refuses our attempts at capturing or containing or hemming in the Christ event. As deep resistance, the means of grace – the juxtaposition of Word, bath and table – redefines our very notion of remembering. Through the perspective of the means of grace, remembering is now not looking back and idealizing a moment in history. It is a continual disruption of our thinking, our remembering, our pieties, our spiritualities. The means of grace confront an all too human way of remembering and say, “This event cannot be repeated or imitated. It is a singular event. And as such, you cannot capture or control it. Rather, it irrupts anew in every situation, in every time, in every culture. It is that moment which is not held by time.”

When the event, the singular event, takes the assembly to that moment not held by time, it places the assembly in a singular time, in the eighth day²⁴ – in the day not of the week. When the means of grace takes the people to the cross – it takes them to the cross present in the world today. The means of grace take us to the cross in human lives, to the cross in the life of family, community, society, nation, world. But it never just takes us to the cross as if Good Friday were the last day – it will always point to the eighth day. When the means of grace take us to the cross, it takes us to the promise: the promise of justification, of reconciliation, of life not only in the hereafter but already now. In and through the means of grace we hear God’s promise becoming for us today. The means of grace take us to the cross, to the hole, the abyss, to that which we cannot remember or capture or contain or explain – they take us to where God suffers in the world. And it speaks to our own suffering by placing that suffering in the light of the Resurrection. The means of grace accomplish nothing less than this juxtaposition – a juxtaposition that sends us out into the world.

Ordo: Bath, Word, Prayer, Table

EUCCHARIST AND SENDING

Sending is as integral to any celebration of eucharistic sharing as are the bread and the wine. The sending is the dissemination of the bread into the world, the scattering of the body, the scattering of our memories, our feelings, our spiritualities as many pieces of bread given for the world. "Do this in remembrance of me" is then not just celebrating the words of institution and the communion, re-enacting a historical moment but it is being sent as living witness of Christ into the world to find Christ already in that world.

The sending becomes a mere dismissal when we adapt the liturgy and its pattern to our lives as *we* have conceived of them, when the lines between culture and Gospel become hazy, when we attempt to dilute God rather than keep God in dialogue with our world, when juxtaposition is leveled and only one voice is heard. The sending, however, as part of the "one law," as part of that singular event, as part of the eucharistic sharing speaks a deep, inner language which can displace our life patterns, prejudices, presuppositions.

The neighbor and the believer are both caught up in the incredible gift of God's continual revelation through Word and sacraments. Luther writes: "So when we eat Christ's flesh physically and spiritually, the food is so powerful that it transforms us into itself and out of fleshly, sinful mortal people makes spiritual, holy, living people."²⁵ Through participation in the eucharist, believers are made one with Christ and all the saints in their works, sufferings and merit.²⁶ Union with Christ is not, however, the inception of an individualistic piety (Jesus and me) as it has often become in present-day North American practice. Jesus comes with all the saints – with all the bread scattered over the mountains – with the whole community in its deep diversity. "[B]y the same love we are to be united with our neighbors, we in them and they in us."²⁷

The eucharist invites life into the continual pattern of dying and rising in Christ, a spiritual baptism, which has no end until our bodily death and resurrection. This confrontation with dying and rising is not merely an emotional or psychological drama. The equation of religious emotion with a sense that we have "died," that is, that we have given something up for God, is imaginary. The dying of which Luther speaks is a concrete participation in the death of Christ, in the suffering of others. It is not an emotional high. It is not sacrifice. This dying, first realized in baptism, is attached to life – and to the symbols of life in bread and wine – life displaced and reoriented through the promise of forgiveness offered in the "one law," the eucharist.

The believer is sent out into the world: "Go in peace, serve the Lord!" Or, as the old Huguenot liturgy exclaims:²⁸ "Go in peace. Remember the poor!" Believers go out, sent as the body of Christ. But

in the world they find the body of Christ already there. They find Christ disseminated in the poor, the suffering, the dejected, the outsider . . . Christ already in the world. And the one law that is the eucharist embeds within it that juxtaposition that displaces bread, body, knowledge, life, even the holy and in that displacement awakens us to a responsibility. The “service of God” as eucharist – or as Luther puts it “the real fellowship” and “the true significance of this sacrament”²⁹ – this “real fellowship” engages us through an iterable, that is, repeatable liturgical structure to live out a responsibility. The one law awakens us to this testament, this almost impossible responsibility – continually sent out of the closed circle, out of the community, out of the old law, displaced yet reoriented, to find Christ already displaced, waiting for us outside.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ The designation “eucharist” will be used in this article. It encompasses the variety of expressions employed in reference to the sacramental “event” such as “Sacrament of the Altar,” “Holy Communion,” “The Lord’s Supper,” and “Holy Mass.”
- ² Martin Luther, *Eyn Sermon von dem neuen Testament das ist von der heylige Messe*. WA 6:354.
[Christus] “*batt widderumb nit mebr den eyne weis odder gesetz eyngesetzt seynem ganzen wolk, das ist die heylige Mess.*” (See also in English: Luther’s Works 35:80-81).
- ³ “...*ut legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi*” – this phrase, found in the “Official Pronouncements of the Apostolic See on Divine Grace and Free Will” by Prosper of Aquitaine apparently establishes a relation between a rule of believing and a certain rule of supplication. See Prosper of Aquitaine, *Defense of Saint Augustine*, Ancient Christian Writers (London: The Newman Press, 1963), 183.
- ⁴ Michael G. L. Church, “The Law of Begging: Prosper at the End of the Day” *Worship* 73, no.5 (1999) 442-453.
- ⁵ Conversation with Gordon W. Lathrop, March 2004.
- ⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Force de loi* (Paris: Galilée, 1994).
- ⁷ Michel de Certeau, *The Capture of Speech and Other Political Writings*, trans. Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 20.
- ⁸ A form of this remembering has been made recently very popular in Mel Gibson’s film “The Passion of Christ.” It witnesses to an ecumenical curiosity: this controversial example of a deep Catholic piety “remembering” the *Via Dolorosa* and its enthusiastic reception by more right-wing, fundamentalist Christians who relive for themselves the sufferings Christ “as they happened.”
- ⁹ The *Didache* was only discovered by Archbishop Philotheos Bryennios in 1873 and published in 1883. For more detailed analysis of this document see Jonathan Draper, ed., *The Didache in Modern Research* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1996) and Kurt Niederwimmer, *Die Didache*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989).
- ¹⁰ Enrico Mazza, *The Origins of the Eucharistic Prayer* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1995). See 30, 35, and 38-39.
- ¹¹ *ibid*, 40-41.
- ¹² “On the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks; broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take and eat; this is my body, given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me. Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me.”

- ¹³ See Robert F. Taft, "Mass Without the Consecration." *Worship* 77 (2003), 482-509.
- ¹⁴ For a discussion of the open shared table of Jesus, see John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (New York: HarperCollins, 1989), 70ff.
- ¹⁵ For further discussion of cosmology and its reorientation through the liturgy, see Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy Ground: A Liturgical Cosmology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).
- ¹⁶ Is there the possibility that in the remembering that occurs through dissemination, a new definition of ritual is possible?
- ¹⁷ Martin Luther, *Das diese Wort Christi "Das ist mein Leib" noch fest stehen, wider die Schwärmgeister*. WA 23:64-320. (See also in English: Luther's Works 37:13-14).
- ¹⁸ "When the reader has concluded, the presider in a discourse admonishes and invites us into the pattern of these good things." Justin Martyr, 1 *Apology* 67:4. Translation by Gordon W. Lathrop. See Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 31 and 45.
- ¹⁹ Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 6.
- ²⁰ Luther – see opening citation.
- ²¹ In English, French and German, the term "means of grace" is ambiguous and cannot be tied down to either singular or plural. This ambiguity I believe must remain as it expresses theologically our inability to pinpoint the means to either one over-riding principle or to a set number of "means."
- ²² Gordon W. Lathrop and Timothy J. Wengert, *Christian Assembly* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 25.
- ²³ Abnormally exceptional memory of the past.
- ²⁴ For a discussion of the eighth day, see Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 39-40.
- ²⁵ Martin Luther, *Das diese Wort Christi "Das ist mein Leib" noch fest stehen, wider die Schwärmgeister*. WA 23:205. (See also in English: LW 37:101).
- ²⁶ Martin Luther, *Eyn Sermon as diese Wort Christi "Das ist mein Leib" noch fest stehen, wider die Schwärmgeister*. WA 2:749. (See also in English: LW 35:60).
- ²⁷ Martin Luther, WA 2:748-749. (See also in English: LW 35:59).
- ²⁸ The sending is being proposed by the Renewing Worship Editorial Board for Holy Communion as an option. See www.renewingworship.org
- ²⁹ Martin Luther, WA 2:748. (See also in English: LW 35:58).