

Become What You Receive

If you do not love, you will not be alive; if you love effectively, you will be killed. The life and death of Jesus dramatizes this state of affairs. His attempt to set up a community of love in Galilee was a threat to the colonialist and clericalist establishments and so he was killed. It was a death, as we say in Canon II, that he freely accepted; he was prepared to totally identify with, to be, if you like, the sacrament of, the condition of his fellow men. He refused to defend his life's work at the cost of compromising what he saw as his mission. He was prepared to see all that he had apparently achieved come down to ruins, to see all his fellows deserting him, scattered and demoralised. He accepted all this because he did not wish to be the founder of anything, the man of power who would compel the coming of the kingdom. He wished only to do what he called 'the will of his Father', which was to simply accept the condition of humanity, to seek the fullness of humanity in love and to accept the failure that characterises loving humanity. This is what the crucifixion says. Ecce homo. This is what happens when you are really human. But the primary Gospel message is that Jesus was raised from the dead – that is to say, God exists. For the only God we Christians know is He who raised Jesus from the dead. God is what makes sense of the senseless waste of the crucifixion. The existence of God means that the failure, the total failure, which is the act of love is a new kind of triumph. In the crucifixion Jesus casts everything upon God. The crucifixion says that the coming of the kingdom is not the achievement of Jesus but a gratuitous act of the Father's love. The kingdom is to come as gift.

'God Still Matters' Herbert McCabe OP p68 2002

As far back as we can go, the Christian movement is understood to be a missionary movement. It assumes that it has something to say – better, something to be lived out – that is humanly attractive across all cultural boundaries.

The ancient Christian tradition of the Last Supper saw the action of Jesus in continuity with the specifically divine activity of shaping a people by covenant.

From the earliest strata of the Hebrew Bible, God is understood as forming "a people". God responds to the cry of cruelly exploited people by shaping them into "a people". Christian tradition introduced the term "covenant" into the narrative to acknowledge this uniquely divine activity as emanating from Jesus.

It is in and through experiencing his reconstruction of our humanity that we come to know who Jesus is. The experience of being enabled to realise our humanity in previously unimaginable ways is integral to faith's recognition of Jesus.

Underlying Paul's discussion of the Body in 1 Cor and elaborated in the closing chapters of Romans is his conviction that the relation of Christians to each other is one of "building up": we are involved in Christ in constructing each other's humanity. It helps to connect this with John 13.

Here we are told that to grow into Jesus's "Lordship" is to become able to wash one another's feet, that is, to welcome them as guests at the same table.

The New Testament, in speaking of the new creation, the new covenant in his blood, does not encourage us to think of this as being in simple continuity with the world as we have made it. On the contrary, the world as we have made it reacts with murderous violence to Jesus's invitation to welcome the future God is bringing to God's world and to the people God loves (Luke 4:28-9).

It would appear then that to grasp the event of Jesus as an act of God, the community must first understand its distinctiveness and separateness. Not, of course, separateness from the human race: that would miss the point.

Separateness, rather, from all communities and kinships whose limits fall short of the human race. This new way of realising our humanity is based on no pre-existing social structures but on sheer humanity, common creatureliness, our common capacity to grow into the likeness of Christ.

Even though we habitually think of the Eucharist in relation to the Last Supper, there is, in fact, a wider Eucharistic theme that is coextensive with the whole Gospel account of the flesh and blood way of being human enacted by Jesus in our world.

This theme of the Eucharistic Way of Jesus refers to his practice of welcoming all that God has let be as gift, and giving thanks for it. He gives thanks for the others; they are gift to him.

Challenged to a deeper humanity, to a level of relating that is inclusive of every scrap of the human, we easily become resentful, angry, dangerous. But since the challenge arises only through the experience of an immense love, we may yet be enabled to respond with Jesus's own words: "my flesh for the life of the world".

Brendan Lovett S.C. The Irish Times 26 June 2012

In the period following the Protestant reformation and the subsequent Council of Trent, the constant and often vitriolic conflict between Catholics and Protestants led each side to shape their theology in explicit opposition to each other, so that Catholic theology became more anti-Protestant than Catholic and in turn Protestant theology became more anti-Catholic than Protestant.

This meant that Catholic Eucharistic theology, the strong emphasis was on the assertion that the Eucharist was no longer bread and wine at all but the body and blood of Christ, precisely because this is what the Protestants were seen as denying. So the discontinuity between the presence of Christ and bread and wine was heavily underlined.

As so often happens in situations of serious and heated conflict, the point of the conflict becomes so heavily emphasised that other areas are forgotten or left in shadow. And this happened with the Church's Eucharistic theology to such an extent that areas of the Catholic tradition itself were neglected and not rediscovered until the theological renewal of the twentieth century.

In this present approach to the Eucharist, the continuity between the bread and wine and the presence of Christ in the Eucharist will be the point of emphasis. This opens new aspects of the Eucharist to us. This is the perspective more closely aligned with the Johannine perspective that in the Eucharist we are dealing with Christ who is the 'authentic' bread of life. He is bread that has transcended the feeble reality we know as bread. He is that gift of life-giving bread in which we are given the Giver.

Frank O'Loughlin 'New Wineskins' Coventry Press. Bayswater 2019

To accomplish so great a work, Christ is always present in His Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass, not only in the person of His minister, "the same one now offering, through the ministry of priests, who formally offered himself on the cross," (C. of Trent) but especially under the Eucharistic species. By His power He is present in the sacraments, so that when a man baptises it is really Christ himself who baptises (St Augustine). He is present in his word, since it is he himself who speaks when the holy Scriptures are read in the Church. He is present, finally, when the Church prays and sings, for he promised: "where two or three are gathered together for my sake, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt. 18:20). Sacrosanctum Concilium 7. Vat II