

## ***The Demand for Justice Implicit in the Eucharistic Celebration***

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### **Abstract**

*This article was inspired by Enrique Dussel's essay, "The Bread of the Eucharistic Celebration as a Sign of Justice in the Community" (1982). The governing question which gives shape to the article is whether it is possible to celebrate Eucharist without at the same time being active in the pursuit of justice for the poor and the marginalized. The article looks at bread as both physical reality and sacramental element; the meaning of Christian community; and justice as the indispensable link between these two. An earlier version of this article appeared in *Questions Liturgiques*.*

### **The Demand for Justice Implicit in the Eucharistic Celebration**

The title of Enrique Dussel's provocative 1982 article, "The Bread of the Eucharistic Celebration as a Sign of Justice in the Community," will provide the framework for this article. Dussel, an Argentinian who is one of the first generation of Latin American liberation theologians, sees philosophy as the weapon for the liberation of the oppressed. He, like many Third World liberation theologians, points to Luke's description of Jesus reading Isaiah 61 in the synagogue (Luke 4:14-18, New American Bible) as the passage that constitutes the essence of the Christian gospel (Ferm, 1988). Dussel stresses the theme, not of *poverty*, but of the *poor one*: the poor are people.

Providing a philosophical and historical framework for liberation theology is Dussel's major concern. The title quoted above as the basis for this article is stated descriptively, but, as I intend to show, the "as" bears the weight of the imperative: to be Eucharistic, bread *must be* a sign of justice; to participate in the sharing of Eucharistic bread, a community *must be* just.

My argument, then, is that the question must be asked: "Is a true Eucharistic celebration possible in a world filled with dire poverty, a poverty

which is to a large extent created, maintained and manipulated by deliberate human choice?" The answer, I shall insist, is yes; but it is a yes that is intrinsically qualified by the condition that the celebrating community be actively engaged in the ongoing struggle to effect justice in the global society. Taking Dussel as a starting point, I will address three major areas: bread, as both a physical reality and a sacramental element; the meaning of true Christian community; and the mediating function of justice as the indispensable link between the other two.

**Bread: "Which earth has given and human hands have made..."**

Dussel underscores the importance of bread as the "symbol and reality of the *product* of human labour" (1982, p. 57). He goes on to explore the three elements: earth, bread, and work. His understanding of the material relationship among these elements is crucial to this article. Earth is the *material* of work in the sense that, without work, there is the earth and the cosmos, but no material. This productive materialism, unlike cosmological materialism, is "irrefutable and sacramental: earth is the *material* of work. Without earth and work there is no bread. Without bread, there is no Eucharist" (Dussel, 1982, p. 58). Bread, then, is the fruit of work, which is the human activity *par excellence*. Work objectifies human dignity. It is through work that humans are rescued from a subjective state of emptiness, and their hands are filled with bread for the sacrifice.

That having been said, however, it is also true that bread is, first of all, food. Hunger is the lack of food, and bread is produced to satisfy this lack. "The simple, central action of the Eucharist is the sharing of food - not only eating but sharing. The simple, central human experience for the understanding of this action is hunger" (Hellwig, 1976, p. 10).

Hunger is a multivalent reality which those living in areas with high standards of living cannot fully appreciate. Hunger is the supreme experience of dependence and insufficiency. To be hungry is to know ourselves as creatures. Extreme hunger deprives people of goals and horizons; all that is important is the obtaining of food. Human vision, the freedom to transcend, the appreciation of

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the good and the beautiful, all are impossible in the face of hunger (Hellwig, 1976). That is why "Bread is life to the destitute, and it is murder to deprive them of it" (Sir. 34:21).

It is important here to note that the Bible sets up an ethical person-to-person relationship between the rich and the poor. In order for there to be poor, some must be rich. But the rich, in this equation, are those who use the product of others' work as a means of domination over them. To be poor is to be alienated from the product of one's labor. Leaving the producer without the product is murder (Dussel, 1982).

The biblical understanding of justice gives a fundamental perspective to our reflections on social and economic justice.... Central to the biblical presentation of justice is that the justice of a community is measured by its treatment of the powerless in society, most often described as the widow, the orphan, the poor and the stranger (non-Israelite) in the land.... What these groups of people have in common is their vulnerability and lack of power. (NCCB, 1986, pp. 37-38)

The implications of this understanding are enormous. Bread is the staple of life; it is what humans sweat to earn. "But it is also the bread we deny to others, as many people in this world starve for want of it" (Newman, 1988, p. 149). Since the source of the bread is human labor, then Christ, in the Eucharistic bread, obligates us "to evaluate our offering and the human process that precedes and defines the offering - that is, the social relationships of production," (Avila, 1981, p. 95) with a view to righting those relationships.

This way of looking at bread, at food, is not new. Eating does more than sustain the physical body. "Foods become metaphor and metonym, expressing ... the fundamental assumptions or world view of individuals and groups." (Humphrey & Humphrey, 1988, p. 2) It is not irrelevant that the lunch counter was an important locus of the civil rights movement of the 1960s: "I'm not going to sit at your table and watch you eat, with nothing on my plate, and call myself a diner. Sitting at the table doesn't make you a diner, unless you eat some of what's on that plate" (Malcolm X, quoted in Feeley-Harnik, 1994, p. 13).

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Food acquires its character in a meal, that is, in food which is eaten. The complex of behaviors surrounding the preparing, serving, and consuming of food creates "a symbolic vocabulary of the basic assumptions of the community," (Humphrey & Humphrey, 1988, p. 3) a vocabulary which allows everyday behaviors to be "invested with multivalent resonances, creating and affirming the very ideal of the community that performs them" (Humphrey & Humphrey, 1988, p. 3). The exchange of food, then, is a crucial part of the rituals that mediate our progress through life.

In the Pentateuch and the Deuteronomic books, as well as in the prophets, the power of the Lord is manifested in the ability to control food: to feed is to bless, to confer life. Acceptance of the Lord's power is symbolized by the acceptance of the offered food; likewise, rejection of the Lord is symbolized by seeking after forbidden food. Questions of the extent of the power of the Lord are framed as questions about the Lord's ability to feed the people. In other words, eating either joins people to the Lord or separates them from the Lord. Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, those who eat together establish a relationship of mutual obligation.

All of this and more is contained in Jesus' choice of bread and wine as the symbols of his abiding presence. At a very fundamental level, the Last Supper was simply a sharing of food. "It is essential that both aspects of the broken bread be remembered: it is a symbol of spiritual nourishment, and it is a call for actual food for the hungry" (Grassi, 1985, p. 9). New food-language is needed so that Christians can appreciate anew the connection between the Eucharist and food for the hungry.

In Luke, the theme of the Last Supper account is direct service to the poor. Christians today must recover that link between Eucharist and food-sharing. Appreciating bread as a fruit of human labor and a part of humanized nature is critical. Humanity in its entirety is signified in the Eucharist. The bread and wine "are an unpretentious summary of the earth's cosmic and cultural Odyssey; in their own way they are a diagrammatic representation of the human" (Martelet,

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1976, p. 35). These Eucharistic symbols remind us that culture has no true value except by providing food to sustain life. "As the bread and wine bring to the table of Christ the symbolic loading of the world's culture, so we must accept that they evoke, too, the world's distress; for the food and drink which the Eucharist uses as though they were available to all as a matter of course are still an unsolved problem for the majority of the world's inhabitants" (Martelet, 1976, p. 39).

To be the body and blood of Christ is to be torn and broken. It is to remember that bread is a staple lacking to the disinherited of the earth. The bread which Jesus blessed and broke contained the gift of himself; it was a blessing meant to be shared.

Today we are aware of the industrial and mercantile interdependence of nations and of the various chains of causes that lead to abject poverty and starvation for whole populations. Our experience and our understanding of our own human situation in the world today is the foundation for understanding what the good news of the gospel is (Hellwig, 1976, p. 51).

We cannot live without concern for others and claim to receive the blessing of Christ in the Eucharist. "The celebration of the Lord's Supper presupposes a communion and solidarity with the poor in history. Without this solidarity, it is impossible to comprehend the death and resurrection of the Servant of Yahweh." (Gutiérrez, 1983, p. 16)

The Eucharist is both memorial and prophecy: memorial, because remembering what has already been accomplished inspires us to do what we can; and prophecy, because the realization of what is still lacking in the movement toward eschatological fulfillment challenges us to attempt the impossible. (Avila, 1981, p. 75): "It is this very possibility of a world made new that is contained in the symbol of bread, understood as the fruit of human production. The Eucharist has the appearance of bread and wine, that is to say, of food and drink; it is therefore as familiar to people, as closely linked to their life as food and drink ... in this sacrament of bread and wine, of food and drink, everything that is human really undergoes a singular transformation and elevation." Eucharistic worship is not so much worship of the inaccessible transcendence as worship of the divine

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condescension, and it is also the merciful and redeeming transformation of the world in the human heart. (John Paul II, quoted in Kilmartin, 1981, pp. 76-78)

Just as human labor produced the bread offered on our altars, so human labor can make the bread of justice a reality in our world. "The Eucharistic bread and wine refer to the world men and women make, the world in which social justice ought to reign and must be continually fought for". (Kiesling, 1980, p. 15) The important thing is not the ritual itself, but the power the leaven has of making the bread of this world rise. The Eucharist is by nature a challenge that "sets a table at which the witnesses to God's love and to justice can nourish and sustain themselves" (Léon-Dufour, 1987, p. 301). Two kinds of remembrance are required of Jesus' disciples. One is a remembrance by liturgical action, and this is symbolized by food. The other is remembrance by service, and this is expressed in concrete action on behalf of the neighbor.

The church can sensitize people to recognize that things are not eternally ordered to be the way they are now. Someone made them this way and they can be unmade. *Shalom* is rooted in a theology of hope, in the powerful conviction that the world can and will be transformed and renewed, and that life can and will be changed. Eating is our most fundamental way of ordering reality and expressing what we mean by this *shalom* (Brueggemann, 1982, pp. 74-75).

John's substitution of the foot-washing at the Last Supper is significant: the Eucharist is inseparably united to love, service, and the building up of this true human fellowship. "The Eucharistic rite in its essential elements is communitarian and oriented toward the constitution of human fellowship" (Tillard, 1969, p. 129).

So the bread of the Eucharist is physical bread as well as sacramental symbol. The Eucharist energizes us to work for a more human world; to proclaim the radical liberation of Jesus Christ for all people; to prolong our liturgical action by "sharing bread that is, promoting justice, fighting against hunger in the world, and delivering the oppressed from every evil" (Léon-Dufour, 1987, p. 299).

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Before turning to the meaning of community, it may be well to recount briefly the story of Bartolomé de las Casas, which Dussel uses to frame the article we are considering. De las Casas, the first priest ordained in the New World, was very much a part of the enforced "conversion" of the Amerindians of the Caribbean. One day, while he was preparing to preach, a passage from Sirach convinced him that the treatment of the native peoples of the region was completely unjust. Bartolomé saw that the bread of the host was stained with the blood of the poor, and he could no longer celebrate Eucharist. This moment of conversion led to a lifetime of struggle against the unjust exploitation of the Amerindians, a struggle which enabled de las Casas to resume his priestly ministry with the knowledge that he was no longer celebrating Eucharist with bread stolen from the poor.

In the next section, I will describe the truly Christian community, the only community which can rightfully celebrate Eucharist in a world where a large percentage of people do not have enough to eat. The Lord's Supper cannot be reconciled with a global table that is groaning with food for some and hardly supplied at all for others. The Lord's table is incompatible with any table that is unmindful of the poverty of much of the world (Martelet, 1976, p. 38).

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### **Community: "We, many though we are, are one body"**

It is clear from the gospels that justice, for Jesus, is equated with community of life and a reaching out to the excluded and the marginalized. We need to see as Jesus sees: the deeper our Christian contemplation, the more involved we will become. In the gospels, obedience in suffering and action takes priority over clear-sighted comprehension of theoretical vision. Conversion is not just adopting a new set of beliefs but relating to people in a new way. Conversion means living justly. The major issue today is not the form of the Eucharistic ritual, but the nature, vision, goals, and practice of the celebrating community (Seasoltz, 1987).

The celebration of the Eucharist both presupposes and nurtures faith. It involves belief in a God who is both Creator and Redeemer. Our Creator God enables us to participate in the building of a more human world, and our Redeemer God rescues us from the evil in ourselves and in society. So, the interaction between life and worship becomes a dynamic circle: we live justly in order to celebrate worthily; by celebrating worthily, we are empowered to live justly (Seasoltz, 1987).

And all of this is solidly rooted in hope, a hope in a faithful God whose love endures forever, and in a Jesus who gave his very life for the realization of the kingdom for which we strive. The ultimate test of Christian faith is not our steadfast belief in doctrines but our steadfast hope in God. In fact, "the bread of hope is all that one can eat and offer to others" (Seasoltz, 1987, p. 312).

The Eucharist both commissions and empowers us for a new engagement with the world. Words and symbols must be cracked open to reveal their personal, social, and political meaning, which is only found in relation to how the church lives its life in the world where God is at work. "The Lord's Supper is a metaphor of the community realized through the action of Jesus Christ reconciling us to one another and to God. As such, it is a sign of perfect community." (Newman, 1988, p. 139)

The church is a community of shared gifts. The liturgy represents a gathering for a meal and a sending forth once the table has been cleared. "Praxis," a word that has deep meaning for many Third World theologians, is nothing more than this hermeneutical circle: worship informs life which informs worship.

True Eucharist forms authentic community. The meal which Jesus left us is meant to be a symbol of the unity of the participants, a unity reflected in the work for that total human liberation for which Jesus gave his very life. The early Christians "understood the deep meaning of the symbol instituted by Jesus. Its social impact was the main criterion of its value and credibility.... Christianity was then a dynamic movement of human liberation from selfishness and exploitation." (Balisuriya, 1979, p. 25)

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Jesus showed that true worship involves identification with the poor and the suffering; he left us the Eucharist as his way of being present to us in our struggles with and for them. Moreover, this Eucharist of Jesus seems to have been action-oriented. “It was a prayer and an offering in the midst of his public life at the height of his involvement in the political and social issues of the time. It signified his irrevocable contestation of the religious leaders of his people and the narrowness of their message” (Balisuriya, 1979, p. 17).

It is important to understand that, for the early Christians, cult only made sense within a context of a community committed to the needs of others. In fact, when the first Christians used cultic terminology, they were referring to the way they lived, not the way they celebrated. When there was a suspicion of discrimination on the basis of language groupings or of a distinction between rich and poor which left the poor shamed and hungry at the Eucharistic gathering, the apostles saw the whole fabric of the church threatened.

Security rested in the community, so no one amassed at others' expense. The early communities might thus be poor, but they were not destitute. Destitution results from some in the group pressing advantages over the weaker members (Hellwig, 1976). This approach to security is rooted in the experience of the Hebrews of Old Testament times who, in their relationship with Yahweh, came to understand that “the true test of whether they have hardened their hearts or recommitted themselves and returned to God is not what they do in the temple but how they show justice and mercy to widows and orphans, aliens and strangers, and the dispossessed who live in the land” (Collins, 1987, p. 253).

Thus, this concern of the community that no one be in want was an integral part of *anamnesis*, liturgical memorial, remembering as the way to maintain the covenant. The Eucharistic assembly remembers "God's justice in its fullness in the face of human suffering; it does this through its remembrance of Christ Jesus" (Collins, 1987, p. 257).

This understanding of the mystery of God's justice was reflected in various ways in the first Christian communities. In the Johannine community, it was

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reflected in the ongoing debate over the meaning of law: the customary interpretation of the Law of Moses by which God is honored by observance of the Sabbath was juxtaposed with Jesus' stance that collaborating in God's work of justice takes precedence over the Sabbath.

The Matthean community, meanwhile, clearly saw involvement in the alleviation of human suffering as the ultimate criterion for kingdom-participation, while concern for the poor is a hallmark of Luke's account in Acts, a concern often asserted in the context of the Eucharistic breaking of bread. The ideal harmony reflected in Luke was grounded in a shared faith but found concrete expression in the sharing of material goods. "While referring to the sacramental rite as a whole, the term breaking of bread emphasizes the element of sharing, within unity, that characterizes the Christian celebration, an emphasis all the more justified since according to Luke the community's daily life reflected that unity and sharing" (Léon-Dufour, 1987, p. 23).

This concern for unity is an important concept throughout the early history of the church. The first letter to the Corinthians shows the fundamental outlines of the ecclesial act of table sharing: bread and wine are taken, blessed, and shared; and the poor are fed. "Eating together at the common table actualizes the church and represents the fundamental paradigm for all transactions in the community, transactions essentially of *diakonia* and sharing" (Mannion, 1987, p. 43).

Paul is arguing against an individualistic morality within a framework of a Christian community apparently struggling with internal differences. In doing so, "he emphasizes the purity and holiness of the individual as well as of the ecclesial body in order to establish firmer social-ritual boundaries" between that community and the pagan environment in which it found itself" (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1982, p. 7). In this body of Christ, there are no social distinctions; discrimination is abolished. "The communal banquet or meal regularly gathered together all members of the group for table companionship. Eating and drinking together socially was the major integrative moment" for the community.

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Considered abstractly, then, the communal meal of the Corinthian Christians already had a value in itself. Its function was to have believers share their lives and thus strengthen their sense of identity and their cohesiveness. In addition, it provided an opportunity to feed the hungry, not only for humanitarian reasons but also in order to let the concrete Church express itself (Léon-Dufour, 1987, p. 20).

Understanding this social context renders intelligible Paul's complaint that individualistic eating and drinking should be done in private houses. He does not contrast an ordinary meal with the Lord's Supper but the satisfaction of individual hunger and thirst with the neglect of that of the poor. Thus he emphasizes the fact that the sharing of food is essential to the celebration of a Eucharistic meal. "The central symbol of the Christian association is not a code or a holy place, not a ritual formula or action, but the very concrete sharing of a meal in justice and love." (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1982, p. 10) "Eucharistic communion, therefore, is not just the sacrament of one's personal communion with the risen Lord. It is rather the sacrament of our communion with one another in the one body of Christ, a body at once ecclesial and Eucharistic." (Taft, 1983, p. 413)

So, the organic unity on which Paul insists does not adhere in the Eucharistic elements but in the new body of communion and fellowship. Jesus is really present in the elements, but he is even "more" present in the organic unity he shares with all his members. "To discern the body is to grasp the indissoluble link between the Eucharistic action and the community that is created and sustained by that action" (Seasoltz, 1987, p. 321). To cause a fracture in this community created by the Lord is to disqualify ourselves from participation in the worship which celebrates that reality.

This image of Eucharist as primarily an act of sharing is the original sense of the *koinonia* of the early church. "As the reenactment of the mystery of our salvation, of the entire paschal mystery in ritual form, the goal of the eucharist is the building up of Christ's body" (Baldovin, 1985, p. 34). This spirit of Christian responsibility and involvement in issues of social justice is readily apparent in

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early Christian witnesses, such as the *Didache*, Justin Martyr's *First Apology*, and the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus. It is also attested to in many of the sermons and homilies of the great church Fathers, of both East and West, such as John Chrysostom and Augustine, who stress that God is a provident Creator whose blessings are meant to be shared by and with all.

In the Pauline Eucharistic model and its practical and theological elaboration in the postapostolic and patristic periods, the Eucharistic transactions of bread, wine, and money took place *out of the fullness* of the church's communion in Christ and gave expression to the bounty of the church. Eucharistic *koinonia* involved the care of the poor and the dead; offerings of food and money found their radical identity in this involvement (Mannion, 1987, p. 328).

In the beginning, then, the Christian Eucharist was the act of a transformed people embodying a living cult in its common life. It was only with the later patristic and medieval periods that liturgy began to be more the means of access to sacred realities than a way of expressing Christian identity, in part because of the increasing clericalization of the rites. "The praxis of a priestly people was replaced by the praxis of a hierarchical society: a dynamic of inclusion was replaced by a dynamic of exclusion" (Mannion, 1987, p. 329). It is no accident that many Third World liberation theologians find themselves more at home in the period of the gospels and the early Fathers than in the age of the Scholastics.

The challenge for us today is to recognize the Eucharist for the creative force it is and to allow it to be, in each local church, "a power which is a dynamism for unity, for regenerating and for re-orientating the faithful to mission" (Manus, 1985, p. 207). In the Lord's Supper, all of us in the church come together as sinners obliged to face the serious issues of our times. In that supper, we share in healing food and drink, in an act of ecclesial reconciliation, and in a mutual strengthening for the struggle against sin and for life, in which Christians, despite their individual and communal sinfulness, are called to engage in the public forum. (Power, 1987, p. 185)

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**Justice: "Then go and do the same"**

The challenge is clear. We have to re-think the commitment inherent in the sharing of the Eucharist. Communion with God must issue forth in involvement in the struggle for justice and human freedom. A stance of gratitude for all of creation will help us realize that all possession is relative. This world view that appreciates everything in the universe as coming from the hand of a loving God will lead to a respect for the full dignity and importance of each human person. That respect will in turn underscore the importance of an active concern for justice.

"Worship is the response to our apprehension of the ultimate meaning and nature of *this* world." (Wolterstorff, 1988, p. 387) God's action in the world and our response in liturgy are reciprocal. When we come to liturgy, we bring with us the full and rich ambiguity of human life. We recall what God has done in the past; we express what is happening in the present; and we look forward in hope to what will take place in the future.

... the church is committed to an everyday witness in word and deed which will give the opportunity for all the material resources of creation and all occasions of human contact to become the medium of that communion with God and among human beings which is marked by justice, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, and in which the kingdom of God consists. (Wainwright, 1988, p. 136)

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It is in the Eucharist that we are enabled to absorb the values of God's kingdom; it is in the Eucharist that we are empowered to put those values to work in our world. The Eucharist, responsibly celebrated, images the justice of universal acceptance, the peace of mutual reconciliation, and the joy of the Spirit. The authentic celebration of the Eucharist will lead the local church to understand that it must direct itself to ministry on behalf of justice.

Third World theologians ask us bluntly whether an authentic Eucharist can be celebrated with bread that is stolen from the poor. The question is not rhetorical. On its answer depends our whole understanding of Eucharist as post-modern Christians. The experiences of the past century, experiences of Holocaust

and starvation and atomic bombs, lead us from a simplistic notion of a God who commands to a compelling God who can only be encountered symbolically through a fresh discovery of transcendence. "This sense of a compelling Parent God who has gifted humanity, who shares in our vulnerability through the cross, is the foundation for any adequate moral ethos in the contemporary world." (Pawlikowski, 1984, p. 320) Liturgy, with its communal setting and links to the tradition, provides the most apt opportunity for the revitalization of moral goals. "The recollection of the suffering of the crucified rules out a view of the feast as an escape from the painful conditions of earthly life. It is more like the silent suffering of mankind and creation made audible in the groaning of the Spirit." (Moltmann, 1974, p. 79)

In the light of the resurrection, freedom lives in both liberating protest and the superabundance of the future. "Because resurrection overcomes death, its protest resists death and the power of death in the midst of life. It resists the private death of apathy, the social death of the abandoned and the noisy death of bombs." (Moltmann, 1974, p. 84)

The resurrection does, indeed, assure us that death will not triumph, but it also places before us the obligation to work against the daily death experienced by so many in our world. Unless we respond to this demand, then our participation in the Eucharist becomes an exercise in make-believe. For liturgy to be authentic, it must be connected to the hard issues which confront us, issues of economics, issues of racism, issues of sexism, issues of armed conflict and genocide, issues of justice of all kinds.

The celebration of the Eucharist demands an awareness of the tension between God's plan and present reality. The Eucharist is a prophetic calling into question of the status quo; as a result of the Eucharist, we should be provoked to a change in thinking and action. There can be nothing neutral about our celebration of Eucharist.

If the Eucharist is the center of the church's life, why have all of us so spiritualized, depoliticized, and a-historicized the broken bread and poured-out-

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wine so that no one remembers or is reminded of the fact that Jesus' death (as is the death of millions today) was the result of a religio-political coalition of those who wanted to protect and perpetuate their social and economic positions (Avila, 1981, p. xii).

The church has a responsibility to evaluate the social and economic positions in the contemporary world. Ministry is not either sacramental or social: it is both. The dynamism of the Eucharist, as we have seen, is a dynamism for unity, but we must work to attain that unity. Through the Spirit, we must harness that dynamism and use it to boost our flagging energy in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. We must believe that, even though the "accidents" of social injustice remain, our efforts can and will have effect on the "substance" (Dussel, 1982, p. 63).

Dussel accuses capitalism of depriving the wage-earner of part of the fruits of his work, just as the "sharing-out" system of the sixteenth century deprived the Caribbean Indians. An honest appraisal of the values and practices of many in our country would seem to bear him out.

After centuries of Christianity, with the message of sharing and simplicity of life, preached and enacted in the Eucharist, one would expect that in Christian nations the difference between rich and poor would no longer be so great and that the poor would at least not be destitute. The abject misery of barrios, haciendas, and favelas of Latin America and the long discouraging fight of the migrant farm workers, the rural poor, and the black ghetto dwellers of the United States of America, give the lie to that expectation (Hellwig, 1976, p. 54).

Many who do the hardest work gain the least return for their efforts. In today's world, to have a home at all, or clothes to wear, or food to eat, is to be wealthy when compared with millions of others. The suffering of Lazarus was taken for granted and ignored. We can no longer afford to surround ourselves with that same kind of comfortable ignorance. Stewardship is about acknowledging the claims of the poor on our resources.

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In the past, priority in sacramental action was often based on the need to accumulate grace; today, all the sacraments, but especially the Eucharist, need to be seen as vehicles for the "responsibility for applying to historical events the basic Christian scheme of liberative interpretation: the paschal mystery" (Segundo, 1974, p. 97). God has entrusted the Christian community with a message for the world, a message of hope and freedom. But to transmit that message effectively, Christians must mirror it in their attitudes and actions. In the world of the pre-Vatican church, community was the means and reception of the sacraments to ensure salvation was the end. Today, the sacraments are means which form and set in motion a community whose liberative influence is the end.

Communion, a covenant commitment to Christ, and the offering of gifts and money for communal needs, the care of the poor and the support of the ministry can be restored to their rightful position as the practical side of the church's *koinonia* in the Eucharistic celebration. If the language of offering is applied to such deeds, rather than being seen as an offering which is a condition for Eucharist and communion, it is an offering which engages us in the gift of life which is offered in the body and blood, by God's initiative (Power, 1987, p. 184).

Living sacramentally, eucharistically, enables us to see that work for civil rights or economic justice or any of the other global issues that have an impact on our world is heeding the demands of God for all God's people. The attainment of those goals will not just benefit those most immediately deprived by their absence; the attainment of those goals will benefit all.

For many in today's world, the Eucharist has been a symbol that whispered when it should have shouted. It is up to the Christian community to make of the celebration of the Eucharist a cry of victory and vision for the world redeemed by Jesus Christ and his gift of self (Mahony, 1983). We must be convinced of the truth that Jesus is present among us here and now, not just in the unleavened bread of the hosts in our tabernacles, but in the unshaven faces of the poor on our city streets, in the unwanted children of our sophisticated society, and in the unhealed millions in every walk of life.

We cannot be one with Jesus in his moment of suffering and in his Eucharistic self-offer while we continue to ignore the poor and suffering people among us. Whatever label is affixed by theologians to the change in the Eucharistic elements, our lives must be radically transformed by the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. We must become communities of the resurrection, touching the lives of the poor and hungry of the world with "authentic and generous compassion, drawing on the bread of life that is Jesus, to become [ourselves] bread of life for the needy" (Dussel, 1982, p. 64).

### Conclusion: "Of course he could go back"

Bartolomé de las Casas was able to resume his priestly ministry and to celebrate the Eucharist once he had become actively engaged in the fight for better conditions for his Indians. As a result, he is looked upon by many as the "Moses of Latin American Liberation Theology." We, too, can continue to celebrate our Eucharist, provided we bring to our celebration an awareness of all that it implies, as long as our celebration is part of our community's continual effort toward true justice.

The bread of the authentic Eucharistic celebration is "the bread of justice, the *manna* from heaven, bread kneaded in commitment to the interests of the poor, to the development of more just economic structures, the *practical conditions* that make it *possible* to offer the Eucharistic bread, the 'Bread of life.'" (Dussel, 1982, p. 64).

“God has entrusted  
the Christian  
community with a  
message for the  
world, a message of  
hope and freedom.”

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