
From Origins to the Table: Identity, Sacraments, and Mission

Rafael Malpica Padilla

John Damm Chair on Leadership

Director for the Latine Ministry and Theology Program

Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

In 1993 I joined the staff of the Division for Global Mission of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). My immediate task was to develop a strategy for engagement with our companion churches in Latin America and the Caribbean. The need for such a strategy arose from the feeling of disconnect, abandonment, and lack of relevance stated by the churches in the region regarding the ELCA's engagement. At that time most of our activities revolved around maintaining missionaries in several countries and providing financial support to church programs. Mission was perceived as lacking innovation, unidirectional, and deepening the donor-recipient dichotomy that has characterized much of the missionary activity from the North and the West up to the second half of the twentieth century.

Latin America and the Caribbean were coming out of very challenging times after the liberation wars in Central America and the end of the military dictatorships in the Southern Cone. Peace accords and the reconstruction of societies were big items in the social agenda. Some people were hopeful about political changes. But military dictatorships and oligarchies were replaced by the “invisible hand” and faceless bureaucracy of a neo-liberal free-market economy. The region found itself choked to death by the structural adjustment programs of the odious and ever-increasing external debt.

The appropriation of the Second Vatican Council by the Latin American churches swept through the region like the warmth spring breeze coming from the Caribbean Sea. “*El pueblo oprimido*,” the oppressed and marginalized people, found a new voice in a church they have rarely seen. Pastors, bishops, evangelists, “*el pueblo sufrido de Dios*,” led the way to articulate a new way of being church. The old paradigm was being challenged and replaced by a church that resembled more appropriately her Lord. Tremendous gains were made not only in articulating theologically the foundations for this new experience, but primarily in the praxis of following Jesus and Christian discipleship. That ray of hope shone with great vigor for about twenty years, then, a systematic dismantling of the Latin American Conference of Bishops began under the leadership of Pope John Paul II. The ELCA companion churches were caught up in this tectonic shifting and let their cry

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be heard by us.

I will not take time here to recount the process that led to the Latin American and Caribbean strategy. I have done that in other publications.¹ A significant outcome of that process was the conceptual framework used to conduct our conversations: *Accompaniment*. In a certain way, *Accompaniment* became a deconstruction tool to the way we were engaging in mission. First, it opened a space for true dialog and sharing. From its start it built on the values of mutuality and inclusion. Our companions found a place at the table. The old missional dichotomy of sending and receiving churches was superseded by the notion of interdependence. Language became extremely important for the articulation of this new relationship. We moved away from mission *to*, to mission *with* and *among*. We worked with our companions in providing theological content to the concept of *Accompaniment* already used by some organizations in development work.² A simple definition

1. See Rafael Malpica Padilla, “Accompaniment as an Alternative Model for the Practice of Mission,” *Trinity Seminary Review* (Vol.29, Number 2 Summer/Fall 2008).

2. My first recollection of the use of *Accompaniment* is a book by

was agreed to: *Accompaniment* is “walking together in solidarity characterized by mutuality and interdependence.”³ *Accompaniment* became the methodological tool and the hermeneutical key for our participation in God’s mission.

Living into *Accompaniment* brought interesting changes to our relations. Administrative practices were re-evaluated, consultation for the conceptualization of program initiatives became the norm, budgets became transparent, and we decided to challenge one another “speaking the truth in love.” In 1998 the Division for Global Mission adopted accompaniment as its methodology for Mission.⁴

In walking together with our global companions under this new *praxis* for mission we encountered challenging and interesting questions. These questions brought new life to our theological reflection and pushed us to consider new perspectives for our shared work. Chief among those was the need to work on a definition of mission and the question of otherness. These concerns were emerging in other denominational and ecumenical contexts. The WCC 7th Assembly in Canberra, Australia, opened the conversation about mission hinting at a movement from the traditional *Missio Dei* to the emerging *Missio Trinitatis*. That same year David Bosch published his *Opus Magna* “Transforming Mission,” and Andrew Walls and Andrew Kirk made significant contributions to missiological reflection. We followed those developments very closely; they had a huge impact on the refinement of our theological articulation of *Accompaniment*. However, three personal experiences solidify my journeying in *Accompaniment*: discovering Catherine Mowry LaCugna, pursuing my discontent with Gustav Werneck (the father of modern missiology), and an encounter with a homeless woman in New York City.

LaCugna’s *God for Us*⁵ gave me a renewed interest in the doctrine of the Trinity. Prior to that my engagement with the doctrine as a parish pastor was the annual sermon on Trinity Sunday and teaching confirmands, a time when many of us become good modalists.⁶ LaCugna opened up a new understanding of this doctrine as a “...teaching not about the abstract nature of God, not about God in isolation from everything other than God, but a teaching about God’s life with us and our life with each other.”⁷ Of the many theologians and Church Fathers that spend considerable

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time fighting Arianism⁸ it was the Cappadocians⁹ who affirmed relationship as the essence (*ousia*) of God.¹⁰ They posited being as relation. The doctrine of the Trinity is a “theology of relationships” (LaCugna),¹¹ and “...a mystery of inclusion.” (Boff)¹² In his book on the Trinity Leonardo, Boff captures beautifully this understanding of the Triune God: “In the beginning is the community of the Three not the solitude of a One.”¹³ Each of the persons in the Trinity dwells in the other, and this mutual indwelling is what St. John Damascene described as *perichoresis*.¹⁴ This love toward the other in deeply knitted relationality constitutes the divine nature. Jürgen Moltmann further affirms that “If the divine life is understood perichoretically, then it cannot be consummated by merely one subject at all. It is bound to consist of the living fellowship of the three Persons who are related to one another and exist in one another. Their unity does not lie in the one Lordship of God; it is to be found in the unity of their tri-unity.”¹⁵

This way of being, this extreme relationality, is what God wills for God’s world.

Jerry Aker, director for the Andean Region Office of Lutheran World Relief (*Partners with the Poor*). However, I believe the person that first used the term in this area was Pedro Veliz, a staff member of this office.

3. Rafael Malpica Padilla, “DGM Strategy for Latin America and the Caribbean,” 1995.

4. ELCA, “Global Mission in the Twenty-first Century: A Vision of Evangelical Faithfulness in God’s Mission.”

5. See Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (Harper San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991).

6. Also known as Sabellianism (in the Eastern Church) and Patripassianism (in the Western Church). Modalism understands the persons in the Trinity as separate modes of the one Godhead.

7. LaCugna, *God for Us*, 1.

8. Heresy denying the divinity of Christ. Started by Arius (250-336), an Alexandrian priest. Since the son was created by the Father, he was neither coeternal with the Father nor of the same substance (consubstantial).

9. Basil, Bishop of Caesarea, his younger brother Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa, and their common friend Gregory of Nazianzus, Patriarch of Constantinople.

10. Gregory of Nazianzus posited that the *hypostasis* (*personas* in the Latin church) “...are divided without division, if I may so say; and they are united in division.” Quoted by Justo L. González in *A History of Christian Thought*, vol 1 (Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1970), 323.

11. González, *A History of Christian Thought*, 1.

12. Leonardo Boff, *Holy Trinity Perfect Community* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2000), 15.

13. Boff, *Holy Trinity Perfect Community*, 1

14. *intima et perfecta inhabitatio unitis persona in Alia*.

15. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and The Kingdom* (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1981), 175.

A narrative of origins

There is consensus among biblical scholars that the story of primeval events hands down what has been said about the beginning of the world and of humanity in an unbroken line from antiquity to these post-modern times. It is in this above all that its significance lies. The biblical accounts of creation have had an uninterrupted audience from the time when the Yawhist planned his work in the tenth/ninth century BC.

This interpretative story (read *mythos*) is retold centuries after its initial composition by a group of religious leaders or scholars known as the Priestly tradition. They had their work cut out for themselves for they had the task of telling the story to a group of people who survived the onslaught of the Babylonian army and were now living in exile. Their city was destroyed, their property lost, and the most sacred promise of all, the inviolability of Zion, was crushed as the temple was destroyed. To this people living in despair under Babylonian oppression the story of origins is told afresh.

After creating the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land, and all the creatures that inhabited it, God saw that everything was good. But there was something still missing. Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his *Creation and Fall* says that when God looked into creation God could not find “himself” and therefore created humans. The account in Genesis 1 is very succinct: “Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image according to our likeness...’” (Gen 1:26a).

Theologians have debated extensively the meaning of this text in general and of these two words. The *Imago Dei* discourse continues to captivate our minds with its many interpretations: physical likeness, image in terms of dominion and freedom, the Patristic understanding of “after” or “according” to mean like Jesus who is “the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15), Teilhard de Chardin’s view of Christ as the “*homo futurus*” toward which history is moving. I tend to agree with the school that understands that the image of God in humans lies in their being by nature social, called to a community patterned after the community of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (a relational ontology).

In this act of outward love (*opera ad extra*) of the Triune God, that way of being, relations, is bestowed on humans.¹⁶ Since community “...is the deepest and most foundational reality that exists,”¹⁷ we were created in relationship and for relationships, “we

16. A debate has ensued about the meaning of the “us” in Genesis 1:26. Is it a clear reference to the Trinity of just the stylist “royal plural” of the final editor? In the Middle Ages the doctrine of *Appropriations* was developed to connect specific actions in salvation history to the external work of the Trinity, particularly to one of the *personas* (or *hypostasis*). In the act of creation, the whole Trinity is at work: “The doctrine of appropriations [as affirmed by the principle of *perichôresis* or *circumincession*] is a compensating strategy within Latin theology that tries to reconnect the specific details of salvation history to specific persons. Appropriation means assigning an attribute (wisdom) or an activity (creation) to one of the persons without denying that the attribute or activity applies to all three.” González, *Christian Thought*, 100.

17. González, *Christian Thought*, 3-4.

I would like to propose that these narratives are stories about “the sin against our origins.” We were created in relationships and for relationships, and this extreme relationality between creator and creatures and among creatures is destroyed by sin. Ever since then God has been on a mission to restore community.

are image and likeness of the Trinity”¹⁸ as Leonardo Boff writes.

Genesis 2-3 presents the stories of our human community.

God walking on the garden.

Calling on humans.

We had a problem. We were naked.

How did you know?

The woman that you gave me made me do it.

It wasn’t me either, it was the serpent.

Community, intimacy, shattered.

Another walk in the garden

“Where is your brother Abel?”

“I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?”

Jealousy, murder,
Philia destroyed.

Tradition has labeled these narratives as stories of original sin. Running the risk of been called a heretic, although a possible definition of heresy is an alternative view on something, I would like to propose that these narratives are stories about “the sin against our origins.”¹⁹ We were created in relationships and for relationships, and this extreme relationality between creator and creatures and among creatures is destroyed by sin. Ever since then God has been on a mission to restore community.

18. González, *Christian Thought*, 2.

19. In 2010 I was invited to lead a workshop on mission at the Roman Catholic Mission Conference in San Antonio, Texas. A Bible study leader used this phrase in his presentation of the Genesis text. I have searched the documents for this event and inquired with Dr. Stevens Bevans on the identity of this person to credit him for it, but there are no records of it.

Restoration of community

Our reflection on the praxis of mission led us to the notion of *Accompaniment*. But where were we walking to? Roberto Goizueta in his *Caminemos con Jesus: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment*, challenged the community to find its point of destination. Accompaniment, he says, has “directionality.”²⁰ The *telos* for engagement is God’s mission, and the narrative or origins lead us to the definition of God’s mission of restoring community. Gradually we moved away from the Emmaus story in Luke—the text used to for the initial articulation of *Accompaniment*—to other biblical texts that capture more fully our understanding of mission and the way to go about it (the *being* and *doing* of mission). Of all New Testament writers, we found in Paul the best articulation of this notion of mission:

“So, if anyone is in Christ there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Cor. 5:17-21)

This is God’s two-movement symphony; in and through Christ, God restores community with us and enables us, through the Spirit to restore community among ourselves. And this symphony could be played in a Lutheran key as well; we know that tune as justification and sanctification. God’s favor is freely given through Christ. The Lutheran/Reformation *solus* point to that reality, the *Solus Christus*. The gift is offered graciously, apprehended by faith as revealed in Scripture. Through Christ God frees us from the deadly *incurvatus* so that we could concentrate on the neighbor in need.

I need to stop here briefly to address the second transformational experience mentioned earlier: my disagreement with Gustav Werneck. Werneck claimed that there was no notion of Mission in Luther and the Reformers. I contest that it is all a matter of definition. Werneck was applying an understanding of mission intimately connected to the notion of crossing borders and converting the heathens (how the “other” was described).²¹ This praxis emerged not as the outcome of theological reflection but as the result of chance when Christopher Columbus struck luck in encountering the peoples of *Abya Yala*.²² Now if a working

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definition of God’s mission is to restore community as previously articulated, wasn’t this what Luther and his colleagues were about? Is this not the principle upon which the church stands or falls? God’s mission as restoration of community is central to our theological identity as Lutheran as stated in the *Confessio Augustana* articles IV and VI.

The gift of the righteousness of God (both as genitive of origin—an attribute that comes from God—and as subjective genitive—God’s power to justify) became the central message of the Apostle Paul.²³ Paul had a sense of urgency in sharing this good news, “for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel!” (1 Cor 9:16b), not only within the Jewish-Christian constituency of the early church, but with all the world (*panta ethne*). This message of reconciliation (*katallagē*) was for all peoples. Nothing escapes God’s favor. If all have sinned, then all are the object of God’s redemption. This radical understanding of God’s grace shaped Paul and the Pauline communities’ view of baptism and the breaking of the bread. In the community of the faithful differences are acknowledged and celebrated, but they cannot be used to exclude people from full participation in it: “... for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:26-28). Practices about the meal must be reviewed and changed so that the other, especially the marginalized and excluded ones, find a place at the table as well, as we see in his challenges to the practices or abuses of the community (and mostly house churches) at Corinth regarding the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:17-22). Paul places the question of the other right at the center of his missional activity.

If the question of destination was critical in our reflection of *Accompaniment*, the question of the other became a salient

20. Roberto Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesus: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2013).

21. Although Werneck (1834-1910) wrote extensively about mission and is considered the father of modern missiology, he never did actual missionary work (as he understood mission).

22. Kuna word from the inhabitants of modern-day Panama to

refer to the Americas continents. It means “land in its full maturity” or “land of vital blood.”

23. For an interesting and captivating presentation of Paul’s message see Arland J. Hultgreen, *Paul’s Gospel and Mission: The Outlook from His Letter to the Romans* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985).

missiologist question in our praxis: how do we engage (or are engaged) by the other? The question came to my attention with vivid realism during a visit to New York a couple of decades ago, where a homeless woman encountered me.

I was returning to Chicago from a meeting of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA. On this day I decided to take public transportation rather than asking a classmate from seminary for a ride as I usually do. After some initial research I knew that I could pick up the M-60 bus in front of Columbia University to La Guardia airport. At the bus stop a homeless woman stood by me and engaged me in conversation. Through her questioning she knew I was a pastor, who had attended a meeting in New York, on his way home to Chicago, taking public transportation for the first time and anxious about either getting lost or missing the stop. I could feel my apprehensions bubbling up inside, apprehensions about the whole enterprise and about this stranger.

The woman told me that she would help me and proceeded to place some coins in the saxophone case of a man that was playing nearby, “Play some good music for my friend, he is from Chicago.” As we entered the bus, the woman sat behind me. The bus began its journey and turned right onto 125th street and while traversing through Harlem the woman gave me a tour of this famous street, pointing to landmarks and places of importance in the civil rights movement and to race relations in the City of New York. I listened to the woman, but my fears, apprehensions, and yes, my judgmental and stereotypical attitude precluded me from engaging her. I immersed myself in reading a newspaper. That’s when I stumbled upon the question of how to engage the other and turning back to talk to the woman, I noticed she was gone. The bus came to a stop and the driver shouted, “Sir, this is your stop” no one responded. The driver turned back and said “Father, this is your stop.” Being the only one dressed like a “father” (I was wearing a black clerical shirt and a black suit) I went to the front of the bus to exit, and out of curiosity asked the driver, “How did you know this was my stop?” He responded, “Your friend told me you were going to the airport and asked me to make sure you did not miss your stop.”

At that time theological questions became spears piercing the heart, texts from Scripture flowed through my mind shaming me as I ignored the “other” because she was a homeless person, a “bag lady” from the streets of the City of New York.

Often our fears and anxieties, worldviews and particular interest, homogeneity, xenophobia, racism, and those other “isms,” prevent us from seeing the face of God on others.

In God’s mission there are always three stories that come into play: God’s story, my story, and your story. Most of the problems among us humans result from our understanding of the relationships between these stories. Often we draw a line between my story and that of the other, and we do it in such a way that God’s story is always on our side. This legitimizes all our actions. From this perspective the Spanish colonizers described the inhabitants of these lands as *humunculos*, beasts without souls, they were

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enslaved and killed. This is how we saw the people of the world, particularly South of our borders, during the American colonial expansionism under the Manifest Destiny Doctrine. This is how racial, ethnic, religious, and sexual others are talked about during this presidential political campaign.

The work of Christ is to take care of the line: “For he [Christ] is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.” (Eph 2:14) To be in Christ, or to be clothed with Christ, means being open to the new reality God creates in our midst. Our stories come together. In the other I find the face of God. Our stories bring their unique flavor and idiosyncrasies, and God weaves them together to create a new space where restoration of community happens and an alternative world is actualized.²⁴ This is the radical message Paul shares with the communities in Asia Minor, an alternative world is possible for those that are “in Christ.” The Word that became flesh reveals God’s intentions for creation and leads us to live the dream of God for the world. Mary praises God for this gift (Luke 1:46-55) and sings in joy about the great reversal in history. Jesus appropriates the words of Isaiah and uses them as his ministry Manifesto (Luke 4:18-19). God wills for the world that which God is, and that community of extreme relationality is sustained by the “visible word” of God.

In baptism God creates and sustains the community of the new people of God. We no longer see the others with human eyes, but through God’s own eyes. Differences cannot be used to exclude people from participation for all “are one in Christ.” (Gal

24. We can apply Homi Bhabha’s concept of “third space” to describe the interconnectedness of the stories. He uses the term to “express a resistant and creative space. In addition, I emphasize ‘third’ as a non-belonging space and time that no person or group dominate.” [footnote 39 in Yung Suk Kim, *Christ’s Body in Corinth: The Politics of a Metaphor* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 113-114. See Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995) [4, 114-115, 219, 242].

3:28). In baptism we are claimed by God and given an identity that surpasses the boundaries of geographies or nation states. I love visiting our companions in India. It is a beautiful country with a rich diversity of cultures and religions, but one in which the sin of casteism is prevalent. In this worldview of casteism some individuals are denied their personhood. Their mere presence renders others unclean. A high percentage of the members of the Lutheran churches in India come from that marginalized and oppressed sector of the Indian society, the Dalits.²⁵ Imagine the powerful good news baptism has brought to their lives. Listen with the minds and hearts of Dalit people to a portion of a baptismal homily recorded for us in 1 Peter: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people.” (2:9-10a) These were powerful words to the undocumented aliens in Asia Minor to which the letter was addressed, to the Dalits in India, and to people whose stories and narratives have been suppressed to deny them their personhood and keep them oppressed. These make-up stories of the powerful, of the dominant cultures, are what Robert Schreiter has called the narratives of the lie.²⁶ In baptism God deconstructs these narratives of the lie and creates a community which is a reflection of the being of God.

At the Table, in the Eucharist, God creates and sustains the community of the equals. It doesn’t matter what you bring to that table, everyone is fed and receives the same gift: “The Holy Supper both feeds us with the body and blood of Christ and awakens our care for the hungry ones of the earth.”²⁷ Around the table the egalitarian community of the Three takes place in our midst. As within the Trinity, we are given to one another in a perichoretic dance rendering ourselves to one another. Differences affirmed, acknowledged, and celebrated as God’s gift to humankind.

The question I have for us is, what are the sociological implications of our theological affirmations about the means or grace? If God’s mission is to restore community, and if through Baptism and the Eucharist the egalitarian community of the new people of God happens, how then should we structure our lives together as a community of followers of Jesus?

The Babylonian captivity revisited

In our tradition we have been concerned with the Sacraments being “rightly administered”²⁸ but I contend that our major challenge is for the Sacraments to be “rightly understood.” Baptism and the

Baptism is a rite of initiation or incorporation into the body of Christ. But this body of Christ (*sōma Christou*) should not be construed as a closed community. To be “in Christ” and of Christ, means being open to the ways, radical and new ways, in which God continues to incorporate people into the body of Christ.

Eucharist are powerful symbols that point to an ultimate reality, the eschatological community of God’s sovereign rule. Although this community is the making of God alone, I believe that here and now, in an imperfect and transitory manner we live in that kind of community. In hope we hear the melody of God’s future and in faith we dance to that tune here and now.²⁹ The sacraments have a powerful and radical meaning, but we have domesticated them to fit the cultic and ritual life of our ecclesial communities. The sacraments continue to be hostages of an individualized religious experience that strip them of their radical and transformational nature. Professor Craig Nesson of Wartburg Seminary has warned about this disease, “...the church in the North American context faces the disease of a rampant individualism that conceives religiosity primarily as a matter of personal preferences rather than communal responsibility.”³⁰ And years before Nesson, Tillich talked about the “death of the sacraments in Protestant churches.”³¹

Baptism is a rite of initiation or incorporation into the body of Christ (“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” 1 Cor 12:27). But this body of Christ (*sōma Christou*) should not be construed as a closed community. To be “in Christ” and of Christ, means being open to the ways, radical and new ways, in which God continues to incorporate people into the body of Christ. Here I would recommend to you the work of Yung Suk Kim,³² professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at Virginia Union University. Professor Kim writes from a post-colonial, deconstructionist perspective. He pays at-

29. For many years I have used this way of defining hope and faith. This definition was shared by Bp. Wayne Weisenbuhler during an ELCA Conference of Bishops. He has heard this phrase from his colleague, the Episcopal bishop of Denver.

30. Craig Nesson, *Shalom Church: The Body of Christ as Ministering Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 1.

31. See Carl E. Braaten, *Principles of Lutheran Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983): “Paul Tillich was hardly exaggerating when he wrote about the ‘death of the sacraments in Protestant churches.’” 87.

32. Yung Suk Kim, *Christ’s Body in Corinth: The Politics of a Metaphor* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008).

25. Dalits are members of the out-of-caste (scheduled caste) in India, at some point described as untouchables. Although the Indian constitution abolished untouchability, in practice, certain “polluting” tasks continue to be assigned to the scheduled castes.

26. Robert J. Schreiter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality & Strategies* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2015).

27. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament*, 1997

28. CA. VII.

In such a fragmented society as ours, torn apart by issues of race, place of origin and documentation, sexism and many other “isms,” we proclaim that there is a place for you in this community. In Baptism God has claimed us, all of us, creating a community free of boundaries, whose identity is found not in its homogeneity but given through our participation in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Christ. We are an open and inclusive community of followers of Jesus serving a world in need.

attention to the voices that shaped the text and those absent from it. In his study on the Corinthian correspondence, he warns against listening only to the voice of the dominant elite calling for unity (*homonoia*) which is used to keep boundaries that give identity (by excluding those that are not like us) and maintain the status quo, therefore depriving the rite of incorporation of its radical meaning. Professor Kim argues that “...in much of the tradition of received interpretation, the ‘body of Christ’ has long been held captive, while serving ecclesial interests and legitimizing the powerful in society and the church. The fossilized ‘body of Christ’ as a metaphor for a unified organism precludes other possibilities of meaning that would open the opportunity for cross-cultural dialogue with others.”³³ In such a fragmented society as ours, torn apart by issues of race, place of origin and documentation, sexism and many other “isms,” we proclaim that there is a place for you in this community. In Baptism God has claimed us, all of us, creating a community free of boundaries, whose identity is found not in its homogeneity but given through our participation in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Christ. We are an open and inclusive community of followers of Jesus serving a world in need.

The issues of boundaries are also present at the table. This is one of the problems that Paul had in Corinth. Some of the members, because of their position in society, were able to come to the meal before others had the opportunity to sit down. By the time “the others” came from the fields, or their places of labor, the privileged, the non-laborers, had already eaten the food. This

problem is not atypical of the society in which norms for communal meals originated. There was a certain “banquet ideology”³⁴ which communicated social values, established social boundaries, stratification, and codes, which determined who could participate, how to sit, etc. This “ideology” is behind the meal controversy at Corinth, and Paul challenges this behavior by pointing to the “social equity and social obligation”³⁵ of the Lord’s Supper. Luther expands this notion of the “social responsibility” of the Eucharist in his treatise on *The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ, and the Brotherhoods*. Let’s listen to Luther:

“Here your heart must go out in life and learn that this is a sacrament of love. As love and support are given you, you in turn must render love and support to Christ in his needy ones.”³⁶

“For the sacrament has no blessing and significance unless love grows daily and so changes a person that he is made one with all others.”³⁷

“Thus, by means of this sacrament all self-seeking love is rooted out and gives place to that which seeks the common good of all.”³⁸

So, what has happened to us? Sri Lankan theologian Tissa Balasuriya raises the question poignantly: “Why is it that in spite of hundreds of thousands of Eucharistic celebrations, Christians continue as selfish as before?”³⁹ His answer, “...the Eucharist has been domesticated within the dominant social establishments of the day. Its radical demands have been largely neutralized. It’s cutting edge has been blunted.”⁴⁰ In our *anamnesis* we need to recover what Johannes Baptist Metz called the dangerous memory of Jesus, a memory that creates new horizons for engaging God’s world and “refuses to allow us to be satisfied with present conditions...”⁴¹ In this holy meal the risen Lord come to us, making himself present in this “resurrection meal.”⁴² This presence opens up what Andrea Bieler calls a space for “eschatological imagination,”⁴³ where the future of God comes to us in glimpses, but yet in very real terms.

We resist all kinds of domestication because “...Jesus’ vision of the Kingdom deconstructs all our domestication” as John Caputo

34. Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

35. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 175.

36. Timothy F. Lull, ed., *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 247.

37. Lull, *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, 251.

38. Lull, *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, 260.

39. Tissa Balasuriya, *The Eucharist and Human Liberation* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publications, 2004), xi.

40. Balasuriya, *The Eucharist and Human Liberation*, xi.

41. William R. Crocker, *Eucharist: Symbol of Transformation* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1989), 258.

42. Andrea Bieler and Luise Schottoff, *The Eucharist: Bodies, Bread, & Resurrection* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007).

43. Bieler and Schottoff, *The Eucharist*, 6.

33. Kim, *Christ’s Body in Corinth*, 30.

affirms.⁴⁴ Caputo's "radical hermeneutics of the Kingdom"⁴⁵ and Bieler's "eschatological imagination" serves us well in recuperating and re-articulating the liberative nature of the sacraments. Eschatological imagination "introduces us to a critical otherworldliness and work disruptively with regards to commonly held world views."⁴⁶ As an anticipatory sign of the Kingdom of God, this meal "...must give rise to a new social vision grounded in the promise of the kingdom. Such a vision challenges the status quo in society and the prevailing set of economic and social relationships. Sharing in a community meal anticipates a just sharing of all the gifts of creation in love. It must give rise to a new set of relationships in society that reflects that vision."⁴⁷

God is on a mission to restore community. There is no better option to live in that newness of life than to be grounded in a sacramental experience that truly embodies Jesus' vision of the kingdom.

Let me conclude with the words of the Spanish-Indian priest Raimundo Panikkar, "The great challenge today is to convert the sacred bread into real bread, the liturgical peace into political peace, the worship of the creator into reverence for the creation, the Christian praying community into an authentic human fellowship. It is risky to celebrate the Eucharist. We may have to leave it unfinished, having gone first to give back to the poor what belongs to them."⁴⁸

God is on a mission to restore community. There is no better option to live in that newness of life than to be grounded in a sacramental experience that truly embodies Jesus' vision of the kingdom.

44. John D. Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct? The Good News of Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: BakerAcademic, 2007), 16.

45. His definition of deconstruction.

46. Bieler and Schottoff, *The Eucharist*, 26.

47. Crocker, *Eucharist*, 256.

48. Raimundo Panikkar, "Man as a Ritual Being," *Chicago Studies*, 16 (1977): 27.