

The Holy Eucharist and Commitment to Justice and Solidarity

0. INTRODUCTION

A well-known theologian has written¹:

How is it possible for defenders of oppressive systems and those they oppress, all of us and the Third World, to celebrate the one Eucharist together as Christians? We drink from our full cups but do not share the one cup among one another. The great scandal among us is not intercommunion among Christians of different communions: that is a sign of hope. The scandal is the intercommunion of rich Christians who remain rich and poor Christians who remain poor while celebrating the same eucharist, taking no notice of the Christian model of sharing possessions: the sharing of the one cup of salvation among one another. For this salvation also has social and economic consequences.

As Christians, are we really convinced that the Eucharist –the center of our lives– has an essential social dimension? And if doctrinally convinced, are we truly committed to justice and soli-

¹ E. SCHILLEBEECKX, O.P., *God Among Us, The Gospel Proclaimed* (London: SCM Press Lt., 1983), p. 178.

darity, that is, to the practice of the two radical elements connected with this social dimension?

In this paper, we shall try to reflect theologically upon the theme *The Holy Eucharist and Commitment to Justice and Solidarity*. In particular, we will attempt to develop briefly the following points: (1) Worship and Justice-Love; (2) Participating in the Eucharist and Fraternity; (3) Recapturing the Social Dimension of the Eucharist; (4) Eucharistic Participation and Social Commitment; (5) Praxis and Prayer.

1. WORSHIP AND JUSTICE-LOVE

Justice is an attribute of God: "I am Yahweh, I rule with kindness, justice and integrity on earth" (Jr 9:24). There is also human justice which means fidelity to God's Covenant.

Fidelity to God, however, is two-dimensional, namely, religious and ethical: It is worship and justice-love. (In the Old Testament justice is the term most often used to mean justice and love of neighbour, while in the New Testament love is preferred to imply also justice. In Christian thinking, moreover, justice is the cardinal virtue that inclines a person to give to another what is his, that is, his rights; solidarity, on the other hand, is the love of neighbour as a brother or a sister in Christ; but, there can be no solidarity without justice.)

Nevertheless, without the practice of justice, there cannot be true, genuine worship. The prophets are quite strong on this issue, particularly, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Jeremiah. To illustrate our point, we read in Isaiah 1:11, 15-17:

What are your endless sacrifices to me?
says Yahweh.

I am sick of holocausts of rams
and the fat of calves.

The blood of bulls and of goats revolts me.

When you stretch out your hands
I turn my eyes away.

You may multiply your prayers,
I shall not listen.

Your hands are covered with blood,

wash, make yourselves clean.
 Take your wrong-doing out of my sight.
 Cease to do evil.
 Learn to do good,
 search for justice,
 help the oppressed,
 be just to the orphan,
 plead for the widow.
 (Cf. also Is 58:6-11; Ho 4:1-2; Am 5:7-17;
 Jr 7:1-11).

To worship God, therefore, implies necessarily to practice justice and love towards the neighbour, above all, towards the weak and poor and oppressed neighbour. After all, what God wants is not sacrifice, but mercy, that is, justice and love (cf. Ho 6:6).

Following the line of the prophets of the Old Testament, and completing it (cf. Mt 5:17), Jesus Christ denounced the fake religiosity of the pharisees and scribes (cf. Mt 6:1-18; Mk 7:14-23; Lk 18:9-14); and also their kind of justice: "If your justice goes no deeper than that of the scribes and pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of Heaven" (Mt 5:20). Likewise Jesus, the eschatological prophet announced by the prophets, denounced the unconcerned rich (cf. Mk 4:7; Mt 13:22; Lk 16:19): not only robbers and murderers will be punished but also those who are insensitive to the needs of others (Lk 16:19), principally of the poor and downtrodden (cf. Mt chapt. 25).

Christ announced, above all, the Kingdom of God, a Kingdom of justice and love. He did denounce injustices; but principally he announced radical conversion to God and neighbour, and practiced a justice which was also merciful love: "The new thing in the new justice of Jesus is that He brings divine compassion into the historical project of building a just world."²

He instituted the Eucharist, the Sacrament of his Body and Blood ("This is my body", "this is my blood"), as the memorial of

² A. NOLAN, O.P., "Justice in the Bible," in *Justice and Truth Shall Meet* (Sinsinawa, Wisconsin: Parable, 1984), p. 84. See our *The Praxis of Justice* (Manila: UST Unitas Publ., 1985).

his death and resurrection ("do this in memory of me"), to perpetuate his sacrifice of the Cross until He comes again at the end of time (Mt 26:26-29; Mk 14:22-25; Lk 22:19-20; 1 Cor 11:23-27). Within the context of the sacrificial meal, Jesus underlined the need of fraternal interpersonal relationships to present a good offering to God:

So then if you are bringing your offering
to the altar and there remember that your brother
has something against you, leave your offering there before
the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother first,
and then come back and present your offering (Mt 5:23-24).

John the evangelist does not present to us the narrative of the institution of the Eucharist before Christ's passion (cf. Jn chapt. 6); instead, he gives us Christ's commandment of love and the narration of the significant event of the Lord washing the feet of the apostles and asking them to do the same, that is, to be servants of love: "If I, then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you should wash each other's feet" (Jn 13:14).

St. Paul, "a servant of justice" (Rom 6:18), underlined, in particular, fraternal love through sharing with one another as a required condition to celebrate the Lord's Supper properly: "The point is, when you hold these meetings, it is not the Lord's Supper that you are eating, since when the time comes to eat, everyone is in such a hurry to start his own supper that one person goes hungry while another is getting drunk" (1 Cor 11:20; cf. 1 Cor 11:17-34). To share in "the breaking of the bread" without fraternal love amounts to receive the Eucharist unworthily and behave unworthily towards the body and blood of the Lord (1 Cor 11:27).

The Sunday collection was also part of the eucharistic celebration. It is probably connected with the offerings (1 Cor 16:1-2; Rom 15:26; Gal 2:10). Thus, as we read in the *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation*, "St. Paul strongly emphasizes

the link between sharing in the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ and sharing with one's neighbour who is in need."³

Hence, the eucharistic banquet was always a shared table in which the participants were in a bond of solidarity with one another and specially with the poor and needy. In Luke (Lk 14:12-13), Jesus advises: "When you give a lunch or dinner, do not ask your friends, brothers, relatives or rich neighbours... No; when you have a party, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind."

The teachings of Christ, his apostles and evangelists are forcefully stressed in the life of the early Christian community, including the need of fraternal love and solidarity with the poor: "These (the early Christians) remained faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers" (Acts 2:42). The Eucharist was celebrated, then, within the context of sharing with the needy: "The faithful all lived together and owned everything in common; they sold their goods and possessions and shared out the proceeds among themselves according to what each one needed" (Acts 2:44-45).

2. PARTICIPATING IN THE EUCHARIST AND FRATERNITY

It is said that through the first seven centuries of Christianity two key elements of the eucharistic celebration were repeatedly pointed out, namely, first, that the unjust and those not united with the community cannot receive communion; and, second, that participating in the eucharistic table demands effective solidarity with the poor. With particular courage, ecclesiastical writers and Father of the Church unfold this teaching and request its practice by the followers of Christ.⁴

Why those who were really unjust could not receive holy communion? Because injustice was considered a "scandalous" sin that

³ CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation*, No. 56: cf. J. MURPHY O'CONNOR, O.P., "Eucharist and Community," in R. K. Seasoltz (Ed.), *Living Bread, Saving Cup* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1982), p. 16 & ff.

⁴ J. M. CASTILLO, "Donde no hay justicia no hay eucaristia," in J. ALONSO & Others, *Fe y Justicia* (Salamanca: Ed. Sígueme, 1981), pp. 135-171.

required public penance and, therefore, excluded from participation in the Eucharist. (Other "scandalous" sins were homicide, robbery, avarice, etc.) Until they were reconciled, the unjust were not admitted to the table of the Eucharist. A well-known illustration of this doctrine is St. Ambrose's courageous letter to emperor Teodosio, after the massacre of Thessalonica: In the letter the great bishop of Milan tells the emperor that he will not celebrate the Eucharist if the emperor dares to be present: "Offere non audeo sacrificium, si volueris assistere." (I do not dare to offer the sacrifice, if you would attend.) Why? The main reason is this: "The Church is holy and immaculate, and he who is not healthy cannot participate in the Eucharist."⁵ (Later on, St. Thomas Aquinas taught that public sinners, including "usurers and gangsters" should not be given holy communion.)

One integral part of the eucharistic celebration was already the *offering of the faithful*—the collection—. To participate in the offering, the Christians had to be reconciled with their fellow human beings. Division with others was an obstacle to participation in the Eucharist fruitfully (cf. Mt 5:23-24). St. Irenaeus wrote of the sterility of the sacrifice when offered by persons who are divided among themselves. And St. Cyprian stated that the Eucharist, which is communion closely linked to the sacrifice, is rejected by God when it is celebrated in discord and dissension. Concludes theologian Castillo, after examining these and other texts from the Fathers: "The Eucharist demands union, concord among men as an essential constitutive."⁶

Real injustice separates also men from real fraternity. As a consequence, some Fathers wrote: The gifts of the unjust should not be received and given to the poor. Why? Radically, because there is a necessary link between the Eucharist and justice. An illustration is given by St. Basil who once rejected the offering of an unjust prefect. In the *Didaskalia Apostolorum* the bishops are asked to be very careful regarding the donors of gifts at the offering, because they should not receive them from the following: the rich who maltreat their servants; the oppressors of the poor;

⁵ AMBROSE, Epist. 51: PL 16, 1160-1164; CYPRIAN, Ep. 61, Ad Eucharistum: ML 4, 373; THOMAS AQUINAS, III, 80, 6.

⁶ J. M. CASTILLO, l.c., p. 161.

the unjust businessmen; those who traffic with legal sentences; the judges who have pronounced death sentences, and the murderers. The altar of God cannot live from the offerings of these people and, in general, from the money that comes from injustice.⁷

The *offering of the faithful*, an important part of the Mass then and a sign of fraternal charity, was directed to the poor in the community. As St. Justin Martyr wrote:

Those of us who have any resources come to the aid of all who are in need, and we are always assisting one another. The wealthy who are willing, make contributions, each as he pleases, and the collection is deposited with the president, who aids widows and orphans, those who are in want because of sickness or some other reason, those in prison and visiting strangers — in short, he takes care of all in need.⁸

(Parenthetically: Is this offering directly related to the collection of stipends for mass intentions? Probably, yes!)⁹

The fruitful celebration of the Eucharist entails justice and solidarity; above all, love as agape. Tertullian writes in his *Apology*¹⁰ about the praxis of agape, as love of neighbor, in the early Christian communities:

We are a society with a common religious feeling, unity of discipline, a common bond of hope. We meet in gathering and congregation to approach God in prayer, massing our forces to surround him.

⁷ *Didaskalia*, IV, 5, 2: FUNK, 224.

⁸ JUSTIN, *Apol.* 1, 67, 6; cf. O. F. CUMMINGS, "The Eucharist and Social Justice," *The Clergy Review*, Vol. LXXI, No. 6 (June, 1986), p. 209. J. M. CASTILLO, l.c., pp. 156-157.

⁹ E. J. KILMARTIN, S.J., "The Sacrifice of Thanksgiving and Social Justice," in M. SEARLE (Ed.), *Liturgy and Social Justice* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1980), pp. 53-71.

¹⁰ TERTULLIAN, *Apologeticum* 39, 11: cc 1, 151, in Loeb Classical Library, tr. by T. R. Glover (N.Y. 1931), 175-176; cf. W. J. WALSH, S.J. — J. P. LANGAN, S.J. "Patristic Social Consciousness — The Church and the Poor," in J. C. HAUGHEY, *The Faith That Does Justice* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), pp. 134-143. ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM wrote: "Of what use it is to weigh down Christ's table with golden cups, when he himself is dying of hunger? First, fill him when he is hungry; then use the means you have left to adorn his table. . . I am not forbidding you to supply these adornments. I am urging you to provide these other things as well, and indeed to provide them first" (*Hom.* 50, 3-4: PG 58, 508-509). See ST. AUGUSTINE, *Sermo* 72, 4, quoted by J. C. HAUGHEY, o.c., 118.

Every man once a month brings some modest coin — or whatever he wishes, and only if he does wish, and if he can; for nobody is compelled; it is a voluntary offering. You might call them the trust funds of piety. For they are not spent upon banquets nor drinking-parties nor thankless eating-houses; but to feed the poor and to bury them, for boys and girls who lack property and parents, and then for slaves grown old and shipwrecked mariners and any who may be in mines, islands or prisons, provided that for the sake of God's school, they become the pensioners of their concession. Such work of love (for so it is) puts a mark upon us, in the eyes of some. "Look," they say, "how they love one another" (for themselves hate one another); "and how they are ready to die for each other" (for themselves will be readier to kill each other) . . . So we who are united in mind and soul, have no hesitation about sharing property. All is common among us — except our wives."

3. *RECAPTURING THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF THE EUCHARIST*

The essential linkage between the Mass and social commitment, between the Eucharist and justice-solidarity appeared de-emphasized, in a lesser or greater degree, from the Middle Ages up to the middle of our century. During this long period, with a high-point in the Council of Trent, the doctrinal and practical emphasis was placed on the Eucharist as sacrifice and as real presence. Since Vatican II, with its great emphasis on the social dimension of our Christian faith and life, the key importance of the Eucharist as communion —and commitment— is being recaptured.¹¹

How could it be otherwise, if the liturgy is the fountain and summit of Christian life, and the Eucharist is the center of the Liturgy? Our Savior instituted the Sacrament of His Body and

¹¹ Cf. J. H. McKENNA, "Liturgy: Toward Liberation or Oppression," *Worship*, Vol. 56, No. 4 (July 1982), pp. 291-308; O. F. CUMMINGS, a.c., p. 210; J. M. CASTILLO, a.c., 165-166. See also S. SWAYNE (Ed.) *Eucharist for a New World* (Carfow: Irish Institute of Pastoral Liturgy, 1981); G. GUTIERREZ, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1971), pp. 262-279

Blood to perpetuate the Sacrifice of the Cross and as a memorial of His death and resurrection: "A sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a paschal banquet in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us."¹²

The Eucharist, "the greatest gift of the Heart of Jesus" (Paul VI), is also the center of the Parish; in fact, no Christian community can be built unless its basis and center is the eucharistic celebration.¹³ The Eucharist must also be —or become more— the fountain of social commitment, which is an integral part of the mission of the Church. Vatican II said: "If the celebration is to be sincere and thorough, it must lead to various works of charity and mutual help as well as to missionary activity and to different forms of Christian witness." The Synod of Bishops '71 stated: "Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel."¹⁴

The Eucharist is Sacrifice-Sacrament, Presence-Sacrament and Communion-Sacrament. Truly, not only as Communion, but also as Sacrifice and even as Real Presence, the Eucharist implies a dimension of action to transform its participants and through them the unjust and selfish social milieu.

The Eucharist is the re-actualization of the unique and unrepeatable *Sacrifice of the Cross*: The Risen Lord continues offering Himself to the Father for the salvation of the world; offering Christ, the Church of Christ (the People of God) offers herself to God and, therefore, surrenders herself to the Father to become, more and more, a servant of the Lord. The Eucharist, often called the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, has an essentially sacrificial character, which calls every Christian to a life of sacrifice — to be crucified, buried and risen with Christ. As Jesus gives us his Body and sheds his Blood for all so the Christians must

¹² VATICAN II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC), No. 47; cf. also *Ibid.*, No. 10.

¹³ *ID.*, *Optatam Totius* (OT) No. 6; cf. CIC, 528, par. 2.

¹⁴ *ID.*, OT, No. 6; SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *Justice in the World*, No. 6; cf. PAUL VI, Apostolic Letter *Investigabiles divitias Christi* (February 6, 1965); S.C.R., *Eucharisticum Mysterium* (May 25, 1967), No. 13.

try to be servants of all through the practice of love for all, specially —like Jesus— for the poor and wretched of the earth: "By means of our service and love, but also by the offering up of our trials and sufferings, we share in the one redeeming sacrifice of Christ, completing in ourselves 'what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church' (Col 1:24), as we look forward to the resurrection of the dead."¹⁵

In the Holy Eucharist, Christ, the Risen Lord, is really present. Not only under the eucharistic species, but also in the Assembly of the Faithful gathered together in his name, in his Word, being proclaimed in the Liturgy, and in the person of the minister. The varied modes of Christ's presence in the eucharistic celebration (and the other modes of His presence — in prayer, in the sacraments, in the works of mercy, in the poor) are, for every Christian, a call and a particular energy to believe in and live the presence of Christ in his personal and social life.¹⁶

In this context, the significance of the devotion to the Blessed Sacrament —to Christ's Real Presence in the Eucharist— is seen clearly. To be really fruitful this devotion must be an echo of the eucharistic celebration or a path towards a better eucharistic celebration, towards "a deeper participation in the paschal mystery." The devotion to the Eucharist must move the Christians, according to Paul VI, to the practice of social charity,¹⁷ that is, of justice and solidarity.

Christ is really present in the Word and under the species of Bread and Wine: The Holy Eucharist is a double table that calls for a double communion with the person of Christ. As the disciples on their way to Emmaus, the Church, the People of God, is asked to recognize Christ as Word and as eucharistic Bread and Wine.

Christ is really present in the Liturgy of the Word. Here he speaks to us. In the Eucharist His Word is not really read, but

¹⁵ CDF, *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation*, No. 51; Cf. VATICAN II, *Lumen Gentium* (LG), No. 11.

¹⁶ PAUL VI, *Mysterium Fidei*, Nos. 35-39; SCR, *Eucharisticum Mysterium*, Nos. 35-39; VATICAN II, SC, No. 7. See J. ALDAZABAL "Claves para la Eucaristía," *CPL DOSSIERS*, No. 17 (Barcelona, 1984), pp. 79-84.

¹⁷ PAUL VI, *Mysterium Fidei*, No. 70; SCR, *Eucharisticum Mysterium*, No. 50.

proclaimed, and celebrated. The Liturgy of the Word is not a class, or a forum or a dialogue: it is a joyful, liberating celebration in which God speaks to us here and now; and God's Word is Christ, who invites us to say "yes" to God and God's will, and "no" to evil, injustice, selfishness and self-sufficiency. Therefore, the homily is, but of course, secondary to the Word of God.

Christ's real presence *par excellence* is His presence under the eucharistic species. This datum of faith makes communion with Christ the culminating moment of the eucharistic celebration; but, communion is not merely to eat the eucharistic Bread but to receive the Risen Lord as the Way, the Truth and the Life (Jn 14:6), as the Son of God and the Man-for-Others: To receive Christ entails necessarily to be committed to building up of the Kingdom of God, to the practice of justice and solidarity.

Paul VI said¹⁸:

The fact of sharing in the same table must have a practical application in the observance of charity and justice, in social relationships . . . The participation in the eucharistic banquet is an invitation to correct the social inequalities among persons, groups of persons or people. Therefore, let our solidarity, a more just distribution of the goods of the earth among the members of the human communities, accompany the communication of supernatural riches by Christ, our savior and brother.

4. EUCHARISTIC PARTICIPATION AND SOCIAL COMMITMENT

At the level of theory, the Eucharist is radically and centrally significant –essential– in Christian life; but, Christian life is *life!* At the level of praxis, is the Eucharist radically and centrally important for our Christians, the great majority of our

¹⁸ PAUL VI, Radio-Message to faithful of Peru (August 30, 1965); cf. CIC, 222. For other texts from Vatican II and Paul VI, see J. SOLANO, S.J. (Ed.), *La Eucaristía: Textos del Vaticano II y de Pablo VI* (Madrid: BAC, 1969).

people? Is the eucharistic celebration helping bridge the scandalous gap between our few rich and many poor?

Some Christians, including some theologians, keep blaming an overly spiritualized and privatized sacramentalization for the lack of social concern of many Christians. In particular, they feel that the Eucharist is more like a sedative instead of a stimulant to struggle against injustice and oppression.

Certainly, we are strongly against the politization of the Eucharist, of turning its celebration into a high moment of the class struggle of the poor against the rich. But we are also strongly against its overly pious, spiritual and a-temporal celebration which while stressing its essential aspects of sacrifice and real presence de-emphasizes or even forgets the essential aspect of communion, sharing and social commitment.

The *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation* says that Christ has set us free, above all, by the power of his Paschal Mystery. He has set us free from sin and opened for us the way to definitive liberation. Is the Eucharist a truly liberating force, personally and socially?

Many young people in the First World have stopped going to Mass. Why? One of the reasons: They do not see any relationship of the Eucharist with real life; thus, the Mass is judged as irrelevant. How to make it more relevant and liberating?

In their Pastoral letter launching the National Eucharistic Year (1986-1987), the Philippine Bishops spoke of the need of a "total eucharistic catechesis," that is, one that "promotes a Christian life of service, sacrifice, sharing, solidarity."¹⁹ In this wholistic catechesis, we would like to emphasize participation and commitment.

To participate fully in the Eucharist, the Christian has to be in the state of grace, including justice and restitution; otherwise, he cannot receive Christ in communion. Likewise, to re-

¹⁹ CBCP, Pastoral Letter on *One Bread, One Body, One People* (1986); cf. E. LAVERDIERE, S.S.S., *Eucharist as Proclamation, Liberation, Communion* (Manila, 1985) pp. 1-4; P. BERNIER, S.S.S., *Bread broken and shared* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 1981); T. C. BACANI, JR., D.D., *The Eucharist and the Filipino* (Manila: Salesian Publishers, Inc., 1987).

ceive the effects of the sacrifice of Christ, one has to be united to the passion of Christ by faith and charity.²⁰

The Eucharist is not merely or mainly "a legal obligation"; it is above all, *an act of faith in communion*. The faithful are asked by Vatican II to participate in it knowingly, devoutly and actively," by responding to the Word, through which Christ challenges them, by offering themselves with Christ the Victim to the Father and, above all, "by eating of the Bread and drinking of the Chalice."²¹

In this context, we wish to underline the importance of the homily and the preaching of the social message of the Gospel. The homily is a service to the Word and a service to the Assembly of Faithful; it is also the space to read "the signs of the times" and interpret them from faith, and, therefore, to denounce evangelically social sins, especially injustice. (This discernment might, at times, sound political; but it is not — as long as it is not "politicking.")

Paul VI said that "It would be a mistake not to see in the homily an important and very adaptable instrument of evangelization,"²² and, therefore, we add, an instrument of integral liberation, including the promotion of justice and solidarity as the way to peace. We read in *Justice in the World*,²³ by the Synod of Bishops 1971:

The liturgy which we preside over and which is the heart of the Church's life, can greatly serve education for justice... The liturgy of the Word, catechesis and the celebration of the Sacraments have the power to help us discover the teaching of the prophets, the Lord and the apostles on the subject of justice.

The most important element, however, of the Eucharist is communion with Christ: To participate in the Eucharist means

²⁰ ST. THOMAS, III, 79, 7 and 2.

²¹ VATICAN II, SC, 48 and LG, 11.

²² PAUL VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, No. 43; cf. CIC, 747, par. 2..

²³ SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *Justice in the World*, No. 58. See E. EGAN, "The Eucharist and Peacemaking," *New Catholic World*, Vol. 230, No. 1376 (March/April, 1987), pp. 92-95; F. GOMEZ, O.P., *Solidarity, The Heart of Christian Praxis* (Manila: UST SRC, 1985), pp. 1-35.

to encounter the Risen Lord when eating his Body which is true food and principle of life (cf. Jn 6:51-59). It is easy to "hear mass"; it is harder —and more Christians— to celebrate the Eucharist of faith, hope and love; principally the Eucharist of love, the Sacrament of Love.

Of Love! And without justice, there can be no love; without being just, there cannot be true alms giving. Why did the Fathers speak of injustice as an obstacle to receive communion? Why did St. Thomas say that usurers and gangsters should not be given holy communion? Why did Bartolomé de las Casas and Domingo de Salazar deny absolution and communion to the Spaniards who oppressed and exploited the poor natives? Why should we, perhaps, reflect more deeply on the possibility of denying communion to public oppressors and murderers? One does not have to be a radical theologian to ask these questions. A radical theologian, however, challenges us with the following words²⁴

The day in which the Christian communities, presided by the bishops, have the courage to celebrate the Eucharist with all its demands and essential constitutives, that day the baptized oppressors, who walk by the whole Catholic World, would be deprived of the religious legitimation which tranquilizes their consciences... It is probable that in this way there would be fewer injustices. And it is certain that there would be more light in the world.

Truly, we will be recognized as disciples of Jesus not because we say or hear mass, but because we love each other; and we prove that we love each other by witnessing justice, truth, freedom and love. The Eucharist, says theologian Walter Kasper,

²⁴ J. M. CASTILLO, l.c., p. 171. A group of Ecuatorian priests: "The hour has come for us as servants of the People of God in Ecuador, to unite our voices to the cry of the people and the voice of the apostle Paul: we cannot continue calmly to celebrate the event of liberation in the Eucharist, in which the oppressors and the oppressed eat the same bread and drink the same wine — without any true reconciliation" (Quoted by G. Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* l.c., p. 282, Note 34); cf. J. H. McKENNA, l.c., pp. 291-308; J. L. SEGUNDO, *The Sacraments Today* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1979).

is unity, communion, that is, "not only gathering together but also serving one another."²⁵

To participate in the sacrament of unity and fraternity implies to commit oneself to work for justice and solidarity: To say "yes" to Christ is also to say "yes" to his brother — to all brothers and sisters. Following the prophets, the Lord, the witnesses of Christian tradition, to love the neighbour is to love principally the poor neighbour — to show affectively and effectively solidarity with the poor, that is, to share with the poor: the preferential option for the poor is not —cannot be— optional, but a radically obligatory option for every Christian.

5. *PRAXIS AND PRAYER*

The Paschal Mystery of the Eucharist is the New Covenant and Passover. It is a continuing passover —passage— from grace to more grace; from justice to more justice; from love to more love.

The Eucharist is the heart of the liturgy. Its day is, above all, Sunday, the day of the Lord and of Christian worship: Every Sunday is like "a little Easter"; to break and share in the eucharistic Bread challenges every Christian to "Go and Tell," that is, to be in the world a witness of Christ's resurrection.

The Eucharist, then, is truly and necessarily linked to justice and solidarity. Without sidelining the other aspects, this social aspect must be underlined also in our historical situation. And also the need of praxis — orthopraxis. Certainly, orthodoxy (or correct doctrine) is necessary; but, by itself it cannot transform persons and structures. What we need most is orthopraxis (or correct action), that is, witnessing. Therefore, we have to be convinced of the truth of the Eucharist and committed to do this truth. To be really committed, however, we must be converted and continually more converted: the bridge to join the sides of

²⁵ W. KASPER, "Unity and Diversity in the Eucharist," *Theology Digest*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Summer, 1986), 221.

conviction and commitment is *conversion* — continuing conversion. John Paul II says:²⁶

The Christ who calls to the eucharistic banquet is always the same Christ who exhorts us to penance and repeats 'Repent' (Mk 1:15). Without this constant ever renewed endeavour for conversion, partaking of the Eucharist would lack its full redeeming effectiveness and there would be a loss or at least a weakening of the special readiness to offer to God spiritual sacrifice (cf. 1 Pet 2:5).

Conversion includes returning to God, to the neighbour, and —again— principally to the poor neighbour. And the process of conversion requires our cooperation with God's grace. It demands constant prayer, a prayer, which, to be authentic, must produce fruits of justice and love.

Our people are very religious, very much inclined to prayer. Some among us suggest that our theology is a theology of intercession. This theology must be completed by a theology of commitment: The religious dimension implies and issues the ethical dimension of life; our participation in the celebration of the Eucharist demands from us, not accidentally but essentially, to struggle non-violently against injustice and oppression, and to practice and promote justice as a necessary mediation of love of neighbor.

We can —and, at times, should— ask God for miracles, but usually God makes his miracles through good men and women. There is a novel written by Gerard Bessiere in which one of the characters is Gabriela, a high school student. Once her friend Jacinto asked her: "What did you do today in school?" Gabriela answered: "A miracle." "How is that." "Well," she said, "our teacher of religion is a young woman who is paralyzed; she is on a wheel chair; she can only talk and smile. Today she talked to us about the miracles of Jesus Christ; but, we told her that we did not believe in miracles, because if there were miracles God would

²⁶ JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptor Hominis*, No. 20. According to the Latin American Bishops true prayer is "prayer that leads to a commitment in real life," a life which "demands strong moments of prayer" (*Puebla Doc.*, No. 727).

have healed her." Jacinto asked: "And what did she answer?" "But God makes miracles for me also," she said. "You, children, are my weekly miracle, because every Wednesday you take me to the park."²⁷

We feel that we have to improve our popular religiosity by helping our people do more miracles of justice and love. And the best way to help them is by doing more miracles ourselves.

According to St. Thomas, the Eucharist is "the greatest of all miracles of Christ": "No other sacrament has greater healing power; through it sins are purged away, virtues are increased, and the soul is enriched with an abundance of every spiritual gift."²⁸

The Eucharist is the miracle of Christ; through our participation in the Eucharist we have to be moved to be just and promote justice, to love our neighbour, to share with the poor, for, as John Paul II has said, "the Eucharist is in itself a school of active love of neighbour."²⁹

The Philippine non-violent *political revolution* (February, 1986) was won at EDSA thanks also to the significant participation of the bishops, priests, religious and seminarians. The urgently needed deeper and wider *social revolution* in the Philippines will not be wholly attained without the active collaboration, and even leadership in some aspects, of the bishops, priests and religious in cooperation, of course, with the Christian laity and men and women of good will. (We remember here John F. Kennedy's saying: "Those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable.")

This peaceful social revolution entails authentic commitment to truth, freedom, justice and love—the four columns of the social order envisioned by the Church of Christ, the community of the Eucharist. A tall order? Yes; but, with Christ—and Mary—at

²⁷ Cf. J. L. MARTIN DESCALZO, *Razones para el amor* (Madrid, 1986), pp. 13-14.

²⁸ ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Opusculum* 57, *In festo Corporis Christi*, lect. 1-4.

²⁹ JOHN PAUL II, *Domini Coena* (1980), No. 6.

our side who or what can really be an unsurmountable obstacle? No one and nothing! (Cf. Rom 8:31, 35, 37).

With the Risen Lord, who gives Himself to us in the Eucharist, the Christians must march hopefully by the path of personal and social liberation. The Lord is calling us –and giving us the strength– to fight injustice; to take truly the side of the poor and the downtrodden; to plant seeds of justice and solidarity in our parishes, in our dioceses, in our nation.

As our Philippine Bishops³⁰ have told us:

The Lord is bidding us in this National Eucharistic Year to work for justice and peace. He is bidding us to live the peace we have received, to proclaim and communicate it to our nation in travail so that we may, indeed, be One Bread, One Body, One People.

May Mary, the Mother of Jesus (whose body becomes present in the Eucharist) and our Mother in the order of grace, lead us to the full understanding of and commitment to the Eucharist as Sacrifice, as Real Presence and as Communion and Commitment to Justice and Solidarity.

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³⁰ CBCP, *The Fruit of Justice is Peace* (January 1987). In *Ang Mahal na Birhen* (1975) the Philippine Bishops wrote (No. 43):

The destitution of millions of Filipinos is an indictment on all of us who call ourselves believers... We who profess to be (Christ's and Mary's) followers must live according to what we say we believe. At this moment of our history as a people, our collaboration with God's work of salvation must take the form of work for justice, freedom and peace... Wherever there is injustice, bondage, and unrest there sin prevails.