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The One Eucharist for the One World  
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ARCHIVES

# The One Eucharist for the One World

ARTHUR CARL PIEPKORN

*The author is graduate professor of systematic theology, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.*

AFTER DESCRIBING THE PRIVATE CHARACTER OF THE EUCHARIST, DR. PIEPKORN defends its public character with four observations. (1) The humanity of Jesus Christ is present and this unites Him and the worshiper with all humanity. (2) The Christ who is present is the Creator of all things. (3) Christ and His Father have compassion for the whole world and employ many worldly means to bring life to people. (4) The Eucharist is designed to prepare us for service to the world.

If I were a Scholastic, which I am not, I should begin this presentation by posing the question, *Utrum eucharistia pro mundo sit?* ("Whether or not the Eucharist is for the world"). And I should have to proceed in good Scholastic style, *Videtur eucharistiam pro mundo non esse* ("It appears that the Eucharist is not for the world").

In this way we should have arrived at the paradox that all branches of the Catholic tradition have tended to forget in the Constantinian era, namely, that in its essence the Eucharist is always a private and not a public action.

There have been times when this might have seemed to be so because of external stress. In the era before the peace of the church—and in parallel epochs of persecution into the 20th century—mere participation in a eucharistic assembly was *prima facie* evidence of criminal activity. Under such circumstances it behooved every participant to be sure that every other person present was an authentic and properly certified member of the Christian community.

In the period that followed the peace of the church, when the influx of self-seeking

professors of Christianity threatened to undermine the church's integrity, a secret discipline that stressed the principle behind the formula *Ta hagia tois hagiois* ("The holy things to the holy people") highly recommended itself.

But the private nature of the eucharistic assembly is not only a response to an external demand; it is also a datum of the eucharistic situation. In principle, the eucharistic assembly is always the company of those who have been made members of the body of Christ upon earth by Holy Baptism and who are gathered together in this capacity alone to commemorate His triumph in His death and resurrection, to realize anew their oneness in Him, and to share in His act of reconciliation, His divine life, and His deliverance from the demonic powers that hold the world in thrall.

It follows that one may have real misgivings about a public celebration of the Holy Eucharist. I am not suggesting that clandestinity is necessary. I am not suggesting that the church has anything to hide in her celebration of the Eucharist.

But I am suggesting that it is wrong to admit individuals to the Holy Eucharist indiscriminately merely because they are

physically present, with no effort to determine if they have been baptized, with no effort to determine their continuing status as members of the church, and with no assurance that they have the requisite dispositions of sorrow for their wrongdoing and faith in the atoning work of our Lord that is made present again in this mystery.

I submit that it is misguided — regardless of the good faith of those who do so — to use the celebration of the Holy Eucharist as such as an evangelistic device and to impose on the celebration of the Holy Eucharist a burden that it was never intended to bear, that is, to serve as the means of communicating the basics of the Gospel to people to whom the Gospel has never been communicated. There are other vehicles for this task.

I submit that it is wrong to use the celebration of the Holy Eucharist as a spectacle. I think of military field masses with 6-inch howitzers replacing tower bells and sacring bells at the elevation. I think of the elaborate climactic celebrations of the Holy Eucharist at international eucharistic congresses and of a bishop of Rome celebrating the Holy Eucharist in Yankee Stadium in New York in the presence of scores of thousands of people and administering Holy Communion to a bare dozen selected school children. Again, I am not passing judgment on the good faith of those who devise these spectacles. I know that such liturgical extravaganzas are part of a powerful tradition from which it is difficult even for modern persons to liberate themselves. I know too that the intention behind these spectacles is to do public honor to the Son of God before whom every knee must finally bow and

whose lordship every tongue must finally confess. But this is not one of the purposes for which our Lord instituted the Sacrament of the Altar.

Nevertheless, even after affirming the intrinsically private character of the celebration of the Eucharist, after rejecting the propriety of indiscriminate admission to it, of regarding it as an evangelistic device, and of treating it as a spectacle, I am still compelled to affirm that the Eucharist is for the world.

# I

What is the Sacrament of the Altar? The Church of the Augsburg Confession answers: "It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, for us Christians to eat and to drink." If we take seriously the concern of the Church of the Augsburg Confession to derive its eucharistic doctrine wholly from the institution narratives, this is the only definition that has Biblical warrant. At the moment this formulation is not everywhere in good repute. It stresses too much, we are told, the ontological at the expense of the dynamic. It stresses the material at the expense of the personal. It seems to deny the spiritual and verges on magic. Other formulations stress the presence of Christ (rather than of His body and blood) in the sacrament and define the sacramental experience as a personal encounter with our Lord. I shall not impugn this formulation, the validity of which I must concede, as long as it does not intend to evade or to deny that our Lord's body and blood are communicated to those who eat and drink in the sacramental meal and as long as it does not intend to evade or deny the fact of the presence of the incarnate Christ. It would be quite wrong to imagine or to teach that

in the celebration of the Eucharist only His Godhead is somehow benignly present at our jejune and ritual meal of rejoicing, in which each communicant receives an average of 140 milligrams (or  $1/200$  of an ounce) of unleavened bread, with  $3/10$  of one calorie of food value, and 3.5 grams (or  $1/8$  of an ounce) of wine. Apart from such a misunderstanding, it is quite true that the Sacrament of the Altar, celebrated as a mystery of sacramental *anamnēsis*, is the arena of personal encounter with the incarnate Word of God, with the second hypostasis of the Godhead concealed in the body-and-blood humanity that He assumed.

The stress falls on the fact that He is *incarnate*. In assuming our common humanity He united Himself with all of humankind, so that there are no human limits to the identification of the Christ of the Eucharist with the one world of human beings. He is linked inseparably with every person, without reference to any person's intelligence, health, sophistication, learning, experience, age, race, color, culture, or epoch. Whatever it was that made the first *homo sapiens* a human being, whatever it is that makes any of us a human being, that Christ assumed and in that humanity He is present in the Holy Eucharist for us Christians to eat and to drink.

This is true for the future also. Whatever it is that will make any of our children's children human beings down to the last human generation at the time of our Lord's final self-disclosure, that is what He assumed. This is so whether they will be living on earth or will have populated the moon and the habitable planets or even—in some way that we are not yet scientifically able to imagine—will have pene-

trated to earthlike planets of another solar system. Christ will be linked even with them through the body that He took from the mother of God when He was born of the substance of His mother in the world and that He gives and will give in the Eucharist to all who eat and drink in it.

If the Eucharist is truly to be for the one world, this stress on His human, bodily presence in it is vital. I know that it is customary to smile indulgently at the statement of the Catechism and other Symbolical Books that the Sacrament of the Altar is the *true* body and blood of Christ and to omit the adjective from modern translations. But the adjective is still useful, even if the particular connotation that it has in this context has a history that needs first to be understood. It is the church's laudable way of reminding us that the body and blood of our Lord in the Eucharist are not some kind of metaphor, specifically that the body of Christ in this context is not simply the church, but that in the sacramental mystery it is the body and the blood that, as the Creed puts it, was born out of the Holy Spirit and Mary the virgin, the most praiseworthy bearer of the eternal Word. It is the body and the blood that appeared to men in Palestine when Augustus and Tiberius ruled in Rome; the blood that first began to flow at His namegiving on the eighth day of His life; the body that was nailed to the cross and the blood that was the very life of the obedient Servant of Yahweh; the body which God raised from the dead and over which death no longer has dominion and the blood that pleads for the pardon and reconciliation of a world of sinners.

This Christ, bodily and, if you will, bloodily present in the Sacrament of the

Altar, is not merely a human being. He is *the* human being, the model, the standard, the blueprint, the die that determines what authentic humanity is, from the first human being to the last. We human beings—all of us—have not only our salvation but our very humanity from Christ. He stands both as the initial and as the ultimate man, the exemplar of human virtue in its most eminent perfection and the one whose irrefragable integrity stands as the judgment upon all our lapses from genuine humanity. And not the least aspect of this virtue is the unselfishness that He exhibits in the act that the Eucharist primarily makes present again, His sacrificial death on the cross for our benefit that is the climax and the epitome of His total redemptive work, of His unswerving obedience to His heavenly Father, and of His generous readiness to accept at His enemies' hands the consequences of His radical goodness.

The sacrifice that is here made present before God and before the eucharistic assembly is a sacrifice for the whole world. Let it be clearly emphasized that a sacrifice is here present. Indeed a twofold sacrifice is present. Looked at from the standpoint of what the church as a congregation of faithful people does in response to God's act in Christ for the reconciliation of the world, it is a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, spiritual (as a translation of *logikē*) and therefore unbloody. In this sacrifice people reborn in Baptism (and reconciled again to the holy community if they have denied their part in it by great sin) hear and accept the Word of God applied to themselves, sing their praises to the Paschal Victim, offer their adoring worship to God, entreat Him in interces-

sion, remember before Him in gratitude the saints of both covenants and the faithful departed that are near and dear to them, receive the body and blood of Christ, and commit themselves in anticipation to carry their faith into action in the world around them beyond the four walls of the church. They celebrate the victory of Christ, a victory that He and God accomplished in Him both in His death and resurrection. He is the true Easter Lamb that has taken away the sins of the world and by His rising to life again has restored to the world of human beings everlasting life. This, in essence, is the argument of the 24th article of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession. But there is more to it than that. We have already stressed that the Sacrament of the Altar is a making present again of God's act in Christ, His nativity, His baptism, fasting, and temptations, His perfect life of obedience, His rejection, His last supper, His agony and bloody sweat, His betrayal, His arrest, His cross and execution, His precious death and burial, His glorious resurrection and ascension, and in anticipation and in vivid hope His self-disclosure to vindicate and liberate His church and His creation at the great *palingenesis*. All this is made present before God and before us. This sacrifice, this oblation, this offering is for the whole world. It is retroactive to the first human being, and it thrusts forward in its saving effect to the end of the age. Although the essential historical moment of His once-and-for-all sacrifice is chronologically in the past, the one priest is Christ and the one victim is Christ.

We have a part in it only because we are members of His body the church. When we offer our praise and thankgiving,

ing, we do it at the impulse of His Holy Spirit. When we offer ourselves—the real “sacrifice of the mass,” according to the Reformers—He is offering Himself and us in Him. We can sing: “And now, O Father, mindful of the love / That bought us once for all on Calvary’s tree. / And having with us him that pleads above, / We here present, we here spread forth to thee / That only offering perfect in thine eyes, / The one, true, pure, immortal Sacrifice. // Look, Father, look on his anointed face / and only look on us as found in him, / Look not on our misusings of thy grace, / Our prayer so languid, and our faith so dim, / For lo, between our sins and their reward / We set the passion of thy Son, our Lord.” (William Bright)

Let me in this connection recall to you part of the statement which the official national Consultation of Roman Catholic and Lutheran Theologians in the United States produced in 1967. The members of the Consultation stated: “The [Roman] Catholic affirmation that the church ‘offers Christ’ in the mass has in the course of the last half century been increasingly explained in terms which answer Lutheran fears that this detracts from the full sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice. The members of the body of Christ are united through Christ with God and with one another in such a way that they become participants in his worship, his self-offering, his sacrifice to the Father. Through this union between Christ and Christians, the eucharistic assembly ‘offers Christ’ by consenting in the power of the Holy Spirit to be offered by him to the Father. Apart from Christ we have no gifts, no worship, no sacrifice of our own to offer God. All we can plead is Christ, the sacrificial lamb and

victim whom the Father himself has given us.” (*Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue*, III, 189—90)

Not without its interest is the documentation that a note appended to this paragraph provides: “Luther says: ‘Not that we offer Christ as a sacrifice, but that Christ offers us’; but he also holds that this involves a sense in which ‘we offer Christ’: ‘Through it [faith], in connection with the sacrament, we offer ourselves, our need, our prayer, praise, and thanksgiving in Christ, and thereby we offer Christ. . . . I also offer Christ in that I desire and believe that he accepts me and my prayer and praise and presents it to God in his own person’ (*A Treatise on the New Testament*, in *Luther’s Works*, 35 [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961], 98—101). This agrees with the testimony of the Second Vatican Council, which, quoting St. Augustine, says that the ‘aim’ of the sacrifice offered in the eucharist is that ‘the entire commonwealth of the redeemed, that is, the community and the society of the saints, be offered as a universal sacrifice to God through the High Priest who in his passion offered his very self for us that we might be the body of so exalted a head’ (*Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests*, no. 2; tr. W. M. Abbott and J. Gallagher, eds., *The Documents of Vatican II* [New York: Guild Press, 1966], pp. 535—36; quotation from Augustine’s *City of God*, 10, 6). The continuation of this quotation is paraphrased in the 1947 encyclical *Mediator Dei*, no. 125: ‘In the sacrament of the altar which she [the church] offers, she herself is also offered.’ The contemporary [Roman] Catholic theologian Karl Rahner explains this point by saying that the eucharistic offering of Christ inseparably involves ‘the

believing, inner "yes" of men to the movement of loving obedience of Christ to the Father.' He goes on to speak directly to the fears which [non-Roman-Catholic Christians] have expressed regarding the notion of the 'sacrifice of the mass': 'The sacrifice of the mass creates no new gracious and saving will in God vis-a-vis the world which did not already exist through the cross (and only through the cross!).' 'We can speak of "moving" God to forgiveness, reconciliation, mercy and assistance through the sacrifice of the mass only in the sense that the gracious will of God, founded exclusively on the reconciliation of the cross, becomes visible in the sacrifice of the mass, comes to man . . . and takes hold of him'—producing, Rahner goes on to suggest, manifold effects in the worshippers and, through their actions and prayers, in the world ('Die vielen Messen und das eine Opfer,' *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie*, 71 [1949], 267 and 288)."

## II

The Christ who gives us His body and His blood in the Holy Eucharist and makes us all one body with Him and with all His holy church through the one loaf and the one cup is the one through whom all things were made, for whom all things were made, and in whom all things hang together. The intimate Christological link between the "first article" of the creed and the "second" and "third articles" of the creed is something that the Western Christian community has had difficulty in phasing into its theology and sometimes has conveniently forgotten. The Church of the Augsburg Confession has not been wholly immune to this charge. But this linkage is inescapably Biblical and thor-

oughly Pauline. If we of the Church of the Augsburg Confession are going to derive our doctrine of justification from the Pauline correspondence, we have to make him at least as normative for the linkage of creation and redemption and new creation. Precisely why we should have this difficulty is in itself not easy to determine. It may be a kind of lurking distaste for matter and an excessive spirituality. It may be that we have taken the eucharistic creed of Constantinople I (381) with its declaration, "through whom [Jesus Christ] all things were made," less seriously than the Apostolic Creed of the West, which dispenses with this assertion. But the link is there, and the link is precisely the Christ whose person and work are the core and center of the second article and of the whole Christian faith. The Word of God, the true light that enlightens every man, the divine hypostasis that became man in order that human beings might be partakers of the divine nature and so "divinized," is precisely the focal point of creation. Through Him the Father made all things, *ta panta*, the universe, the space and the time that are the coordinates of our creaturely existence and everything that fills them, with the one world of human beings as the visible apex and climax. Without him was not anything made. The *world*, the prolog to the fourth gospel repeats, was made through Him. (John 1:1, 3, 10)

But the Father did not only make everything *through* His Son, but also *in* Him and *for* Him. The Son of God, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins, St. Paul says, is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, for in Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible

—all things were created through Him and for Him, so that He is the goal toward which creation is moving. He is before all things and in Him all things hold together (Col. 1:14-17). Christ Himself is the great hoop that circles the universe, the great parenthesis and bracket that unifies the diversity of things. The scope of these words is dizzying. It goes back beyond all history, all paleontology, all cosmogony, to the beginning of all beginnings, no matter how inconceivably remote in time that moment may have been. It spans the entire universe, beyond all solar systems, all galaxies, all quasars, and all the truth that there is in the still unverified and possibly unverifiable speculations of astronomers and physicists and mathematicians. It thrusts forward into time unimaginable, into a possible future where our extrapolations are meaningless and our very attempt at prophecy is ludicrous, a world possibly a hundred times more different from ours than the worlds of Mesillim of Kish or of Narmer of Abydos, the first genuinely historical monarchs of Akkad and Egypt, are different from the world of Richard Nixon and Heinrich Lübke and Gustaf VI Adolf. But in Him and through Him and to Him who gives us His body and His blood in the Eucharist this vast universe has its being and its meaning.

There is even more to it. When I quoted the first chapter of Colossians before, you noted that I omitted one clause. When St. Paul speaks of the created universe, he speaks not only of the things visible but also of the things invisible, and goes on: "whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities." He thinks here not only of the minions of malice but also

of the unseen messengers of God. I do not pretend to know who or what the seraphim and the cherubim, the thrones, the dominations, the principalities, the authorities, the powers, the archangels, and the angels are. I know that conventional ideas about them are compounded at least as much of the speculations of Pseudo-St. Dionysius the Areopagite and St. Thomas Aquinas — and, in the English-speaking world, of John Milton — and of the desperate efforts of painters and sculptors to make the unseen visible, as they are of the sometimes restrained and sometimes apocalyptically exuberant imagery of the Sacred Scriptures. But whoever and whatever these invisible powers are, they *are*. The church has been particularly aware of them as she gathers about the altar of the Eucharist ever since the Holy, Holy, Holy became a part of the canon. This chant evoked the image of the heavenly temple with the angels and archangels and all the seven other ranks of the celestial militia ("the company of heaven"), adoring the Lord of the angelic armies with theologies that will never cease (*asigētais theologiais*).

In our era and in our culture where we are so uncomfortably aware of a drift toward the demonic, a list toward nonbeing, a flight from integrity toward disintegration and a centrifugal thrust toward undisguised nihilism, we need as the church to be able to affirm that our whole universe hangs together in Christ. Human beings need the assurance that their world is not a gigantic accident or worse, or that their environment is not dominated by a caco-daemon, but that in spite of the malice of the world rulers of this present darkness (Eph. 6:12), as the New Testament personifies the forces of evil, this is our Fa-



ther's world, which He made through and for His Son. The same Word through whom He made the universe, sitting not only as God but also as a human being at the right hand of the divine power (to use the Biblical metaphor), is holding it together and is making ultimate sense of its terrifying absurdities. "Nothing," blessed Martin Luther reminds the readers of his *Vom Abendmahl Christi Bekenntnis* (1528) (and it is not immaterial that he is moved to say so in a discussion of the Eucharist), "is so small but God is still smaller, nothing so large but God is still larger; nothing is so short but God is still shorter, nothing so long but God is still longer; nothing is so broad but God is still broader, nothing so narrow but God is still narrower; and so on. He is an inexpressible being, above and beyond all that can be described or imagined" (Weimarer Ausgabe, 23, 339, 39—340, 2; *Luther's Works*, 37 [Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961], 228). Because the Christ of the Eucharist is God as well as one of us, this can be affirmed with equal propriety of Him.

### III

Because we eat the body and drink the blood of this cosmic Christ, we are bound in Him to His concerns. Because He is preeminently the man who is the model of all men, nothing human is alien to Him. Everything in history, everything in the present, and everything in the future is part of the experience of Him who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. There is no achievement of the human spirit that is not His triumph; there is no disaster that involves human beings that is not His grief. By the same token there is no achievement of the human spirit that is

not our triumph, and there is no disaster that involves human beings that is not our grief. The difference is that our time-frame is our short life, our scope the limited personal universes of which we are a part.

There is likewise a prominent element of vocation and opportunity and resources in all of this. Our Lord reminded His hearers on one occasion that there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, but Elijah was sent only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, and that there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha and none of them was cleansed but only Naaman the Syrian. While His immediate point was different, we may observe that even in His own incarnate ministry He did not heal all the sick in Israel or give sight to all the blind or raise all the dead. But we cannot let our limitations paralyze our concern. Granted that we do not all have the same vocational responsibility, the same financial resources, the same opportunities, the same information, the same experience, the same capacity for accurate evaluation, the same ability to foresee the results of various courses of action. A president of the United States can order the mobilization of resources that puts two men on the moon in a decade. A high court can enforce a policy of integration designed to end an epoch of separate and unequal systems of education. Another head of state can stand stubbornly in the way of peace even though it costs his country half a million dead. Or he can command the musicians, the poets, the dramatists, and the artists of his land to conform to a prescribed line, with confinement in a labor camp or a psychiatric ward as the alternatives. The head of a giant research organization can bring about the

discovery of a vaccine that ends the threat of poliomyelitis to the children of the world. A charismatic leader can mount a literacy program that liberates millions from the bondage of ignorance. A politically influential corporation can pollute the air with poisonous fumes with impunity and another can clog a waterway with noxious wastes. You and I lack this kind of power individually. Yet, I could repeat, we cannot allow our relative impotence to paralyze such activity on behalf of positive goals as we can muster.

Everyone who eats the body and drinks the blood of the Christ through whom and in whom and for whom all things were made can, according to his vocation and influence and resources, conscientiously seek to redeem the area of his own influence for the Christ whose advent into the world had as its aim the destruction of the works of the adversary. The Christ who in His lifetime manifested Himself as the sworn enemy of injustice, of disease, of prejudice, of discrimination, and of exploitation is calling us to an imitation of Himself in these areas also. He calls upon us to use His gifts of creation with reverence and with the awareness that we have no moral right to exploit them at the expense either of our contemporaries or of the generations that will follow us. He calls us to a concern for minorities, the underprivileged, the disenfranchised, the handicapped, the ill, the lawbreaker as well as the administrator of the law, the perpetrator as well as the victim of violence, the people who rank as our political foes as well as those who rank as our political allies, and for have-not nations as well as for have-not individuals. He calls us to a concern for good government, for peace,

for public decency and order, for integrity. He does so because He whose body we eat and whose blood we drink and whose slaves we are has a proprietary interest in these things.

The Eucharist is a symbol of the renewal of all things by Christ and in Christ. This is part of Christ's total sacramental design. By His own baptism He hallows Jordan and all waters to be a saving flood and an abundant washing away of sin. By His own union with His bride the church He reflects this great mystery in the union of every Christian husband with every Christian wife and, in a fainter refraction of the mystery, in every human union where every act of unselfish giving of oneself in authentic love, no matter how fleeting, mirrors His love for the world that He has reconciled to God. By His separation to His service of a man upon whom the Spirit's charism of priesthood is bestowed in the laying on of hands, Christ affirms His will that no potential harvest anywhere in the world be lost because of a lack of laborers—a point that the earliest Lutheran ordinals made very strongly. Through the reconciliation of the penitent in holy absolution He affirms that the door of hope and of rescue that the Holy Spirit opened in Baptism is never closed as long as life lasts.

Without invoking any improper kind of natural theology, the event of the Eucharist goes beyond any of these. For here our Lord takes bread, the product of seed mysteriously produced by the parent grain, scattered upon fields prepared by human labor, harvested and threshed by human toil (or at least through human ingenuity), gathered together and made one, ground up and baked and offered as the

symbol of the total consecration of everything that the worshipers are and do and have (at least ideally and intentionally). Again He takes wine from who knows how many grapes, tended by careful hands as they grew on who knows how many vines, pressed and stored by the vintner, and offered as a symbol of the will to obey the Father after the pattern of the Savior whose perfect obedience compensates for our imperfect obedience and our disobediences. What our Lord thus takes is not merely the work of God's creation but the work of human hands and the application of human skills and human knowledge. The bread and wine of the Eucharist stand as it were as symbols of the whole sweep of human activity, from that frustratingly transitory labor that leaves no monument at all—trash and litter removed, floors swept and scrubbed, children's faces and hands washed and wiped in endless repetition, temperatures taken in a clinic, blood transfused, operations performed, and every other necessary but uneventful occupation—to those other human callings that create enduring monuments—structures built, sculptures fashioned, paintings limned, law codes constructed, machines manufactured, music composed, constitutions framed, empires established. Our Lord takes this God-given and man-made bread and wine and by His mighty Word makes it His body and His blood. In so doing He affirms His right by creation and conquest to all the creatures of God's hand, to all the fruits of human labor, and to all the orders and institutions of the universe. But He does more. In taking a particular loaf and a particular chalice of wine as the vehicles of His body and His blood, at random, as it were, He anticipates the time

when all of the groaning and travailing creation will have achieved that freedom that is its destiny, when the power of futility and of sin over it will be broken and it will possess the transfiguring glory for which it now waits in hope with such eager longing.

#### IV

The Eucharist is the occasion for the church's intercession on behalf of all the world. It is at the Eucharist that historically the church has offered her most fervent "supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings for all men, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way" (1 Tim. 2: 1-2). Consider the text of the liturgy itself. Take first the Kyrie eleison. In its present abbreviated ninefold or threefold form it is explicitly nothing more than the church's acclamation of the Christ who conquers, who reigns, and who rules. For its implicit significance we need not, however, go back to the divine liturgy of Eastern Christendom, of whose diaconic *ektenē* ("fervent prayer") the Kyrie is the counterpart and the remnant. In the *Deprecatio Gelasii*, the "Entreaty of St. Gelasius," the late fifth-century bishop of Rome, we have an excellent example of a Western litany of intercession. It brings before God His holy church, His holy servants, those who minister about the altar, all the nations that worship the true God, those who rightly handle the Word of truth, those who discipline themselves in mind and body for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, godly princes and Christian armies, catechumens, those who engage in works of pious devotion, all who enter the holy precincts of the Lord's house, and all those

who at a given Eucharist invoke God's compassion for themselves and their needs. But it also pleads for pleasant sunshine and timely rainfall, for gentle winds, and for the regular course of season upon season. It implores God on behalf of those whom human weakness, the enmity of spiritual evil, or the manifold errors of this present world have ensnared; on behalf of those who face dangers in their travels, the oppression of an unjust government, and the burdensome occupation of their land by the enemy; and on behalf of the Jews, the heretics, and the pagans.

While the ancient collects are commonly petitions of Christians for Christians, they remember that God governs all things in heaven and earth (Epiphany II), that in the Easter solemnity God has bestowed restoration upon the world (Easter Monday), that in the humiliation of His Son God raised up the falling world (Easter II), that God can be called upon to order the course of the world peaceably by His governance (Trinity IV), and that His providence never fails as it works itself out (Trinity VII). (The English Lutheran rite correctly sees the implications of this when it paraphrases the clause: "whose never-failing providence orders all things both in heaven and earth.") The collects ask for the grace to imitate St. Stephen, the first martyr, in praying for his murderers (St. Stephen's Day), and they recall that in the preaching of Blessed Paul the Apostle God was teaching the entire world (Conversion of St. Paul).

In the great intercession anciently appointed for Good Friday the congregation is invited to invoke God to deliver the world from all error, take away disease,

ward off famine, open the prisons, set free those in bondage, grant a safe return to the wayfarers, health to the sick, and to mariners a harbor of security. The petition that corresponds to this bidding commends to God the prayers of them that in any tribulation or distress cry to Him, that in all their necessities they may mark and receive His manifold help and comfort. The prayer also pleads for schismatics, the Jews, and the heathen. In the admirable extension that the Good Friday Bidding Prayer received in the Lutheran community in the 16th century, the prayer for peace called upon the Lord of heaven and earth, by whose Spirit all things are governed, by whose providence all things are ordered, the God of Peace and the author of all concord. It pleaded explicitly for the enemies of the church, for the fruit of the womb—God's own creatures—and for the fruits of the earth. This last petition recalls that through His Word the Father has created and blesses and upholds all things, and on that basis demands the grace that makes possible His blessing on all the fruits of the earth.

We remember that Luther revived the litany in the Lutheran community in 1529 because of the threat from the East to the Holy Roman Empire as symbolized by the siege of Vienna. He saw it not only as a threat to the *religious* values and institutions of the West but as a threat to *all* the institutions and *all* the values that the West cherished. We remember too that the scope of this intercession included all kings and princes and the emperor, all those in affliction and peril, mothers-to-be, children, those who are ill, captives, widows, and orphans, the church's enemies, persecutors, and slanderers, the fruits of

the earth, and in an unlimited sweep, the mercy of God upon all men.

Our vernacular translations occlude what was intended to be another occasion in the liturgy for praying for more than the church. From the tenth century on the final *miserere nobis* of the *Agnus* had increasingly given place to the plea: *Dona nobis pacem*. We spiritualize it and render it: "Grant us *your* peace." But it is worth noting that there is impressive evidence that while the initial impetus for this change may have originated in the *Pax Domini* and the kiss of peace that preceded the *Agnus*, it was the political situation that led to the retention of this plea for peace in all its forms.

## V

The Eucharist is part of our preparation for service to the whole world. In giving us His body and His blood, our Lord is uniting us with Himself. In a real sense He is reconciling us to God. He is imparting to His God's own divine life. He is saving us, that is, He is rescuing us from our fallenness, our lostness, our isolation, and our alienation, and giving us in this age a part of that independence and power and wholeness that will be ours totally when He once more manifests Himself at the great epiphany. This is ultimately what we mean when we say that "forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation" are there for us in the Sacrament of the Altar. The Holy Eucharist is not the only channel of the Holy Spirit, but it is a unique one from which we cannot dispense ourselves. Here, even though not here alone, we receive the strength that we need in order to convert merely making a living into a Christian vocation. Here, even though not here

alone, God gives us the encouragement that we need in order to look beyond the shrunken horizons into which we perennially slip. Here the eating of our Lord's body and the drinking of His blood are a part of our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Here we have the divine remedy against sin, flesh, devil, world, death, danger, and hell, and a bestowing of grace, life, paradise, heaven, Christ, and God, the Small Catechism (Preface 23) affirms. Here — to cite the Large Catechism — we have a safeguard against death and all misfortune, a food of the soul, nourishing and strengthening the new man; a daily pasture and sustenance, a refreshment of our faith in the battle of life; a consolation of overburdened hearts; a treasure from heaven; a precious antidote against the poison of weakness; and a pure, wholesome, soothing medicine that aids and quickens us in both soul and body (Sacrament of the Altar 22-24.27.66.68.70). Here we receive the bread and the flesh that the Son of God gave for the life of the world. In our participation in this holy sacrament He makes present again for us His saving death and His life-giving resurrection. That death on a cross, He Himself tells us, was to be the means by which He would draw the whole world to Himself. In the power of that death in our lives we too can rise above the fears and the apprehensions and the selfishness that threaten to paralyze our witness in word and in work and can become the agents of Christ in our own individual universes of influence that Christ calls us to be. It is not an accident that eucharistic renewal and a renewal of the church's awareness of her servant role in the world outside the walls of her buildings have always tended to go

hand in hand, and that liturgy and a sense of awareness of the Christian responsibility for society have so often accompanied one another. It was a profound sense of the way things are that moved the third-century church in Africa to modify its rigorist refusal to communicate penitent apostates and *libellatici* and in the face of a new wave of persecution to seek to give its probable victims all the resources of courage and strength and fortitude that the church had in her hands. The power of the Eucharist to strengthen and fortify 20th-century Christians for their witness has not diminished.

## VI

The fellowship that the Eucharist creates is universal. The church in which and by which the Eucharist is celebrated is not the totality of those whom Christ by His atoning death has reconciled to the Father, but neither is it something that exists in isolation from the total community in which it witnesses to the presence of Christ. The church may include a large percentage or a very small percentage of a nation or a tribe or a territory or a culture, but the entire culture and the entire territory and the entire tribe and the entire nation is present in the church. Because the fellowship that the Eucharist creates binds in one all those who ever ate and drank in it, who eat and drink in it, and who will ever eat and drink in it *donec veniat* ("until [Christ] comes"), it is a universal fellowship and community. There is no race outside it, just as there is no racial difference within it. There is no nationality that is not represented in the people of God. There is no language in which the words "Take, eat, this is My body . . . All of

you drink of it, this cup is the new covenant in My blood" are not spoken. There is no culture whose art has not been drawn on to glorify the King that comes in the name of the Lord. There is no ideology that has not had to yield to Christ in its total demand upon persons whom this sacrament has nourished. There are no divisions that it has not transcended—the unnatural barriers that the Tower of Babel account attributes to the divine judgment upon human *hybris*; the hatreds that have been generated and diligently perpetuated for generations and for centuries; the walls, sometimes of brick and mortar and barbed wire and sometimes of more tenuous stuff, that have been built to divide nations and cities and families; the bitterness created by the conqueror's oppression of the vanquished; the wars that have been fought, sometimes for literally no better reason than the War of Jenkins' Ear, that had England declaring war against Spain in 1739 and involved the British in the War for the Austrian Succession until 1748; the national guilt felt by countries that in periods of crucial challenge remained neutral or even supported a less just side out of considerations of craven fear or greedy avarice.

The fellowship of the Eucharist, the fellowship of the one body that Christ creates through the one loaf, transcends them all. I am not suggesting that a Christian does not share in the feelings of the larger society of which he is a part. He is always a child of his age, influenced by his own environment, diverted by the biases and prejudices that pervade his world, propagandized by mass media that are never wholly neutral, solicited to make moral decisions in terms of selfish advantage. But

these do not have the final word in the Christian's commitment. The Eucharist transcends these and makes us in our dividedness and separation one body in Christ. Its thrust toward unity is more powerful than the divisive elements that fragment our world and our lives. The God who is one is finally stronger than the demons that are legion. And ultimately even those who build the fences of race and nationality and language and ideology and denomination around the altar of Christ must, whether they will or not, suffer themselves to be united with those whom they seek to exclude. For the altar of the Eucharist is one and its fellowship is one and its communion is one and the body that it creates is one.

## VII

Because the sacrifice that is made present again in the Eucharist avails for the reconciliation of the entire world with God, our own task is clear. We need to communicate the good news of God's act in Christ to those whom it affects, that is, to all men. Communication calls for more than speaking. We do not necessarily communicate when we use the jargon into which we as theologians or as pastors fall quite naturally. We do not even communicate when we use the alien vocabulary and the alien repertoire of metaphors even of the Sacred Scriptures, precious as this vocabulary and these metaphors invariably become to a Christian. Somehow we need to say in a plain and intelligible way that every individual whom we meet in existential contact is a redeemed and forgiven child of God. We need to make it clear that he is not one who is still to be saved (except in the exclusively subjective sense

of the term), but one who is saved. Somehow we need to say exactly what St. Paul sensed as his message: "Be reconciled to God. Know that He reconciled you to Himself as part of the one world. Become what you are."

In all this we must not think of ourselves as in any sense bringing Christ where He is not already. It is His all-pervading Holy Spirit that we hail as Creator and Recreator. We know, in the words of the Augustana, that in His exaltation Christ sits at the right hand of the Father forever to reign and be Lord over all creatures (3,4). We know that He calls all men to brotherhood and that He is latently present wherever, even at a "secular" or "profane" level, the ideal of brotherhood is anywhere or at any time achieved. (By the same token, the existence of the denial of brotherhood is a mark of the active presence of the demonic forces that our Lord came to destroy.) We know that He who is the truth and the faithfulness of God is at least latently present wherever there is any kind of truth and any kind of faithfulness. And we know that He through whom God made all good things for human beings to use and to enjoy and to share is latently present wherever there is any unselfish sharing, just as He who will judge the world in justice at the end of time is present wherever there is justice, that He who is God's Word of pardon to the world is present latently wherever there is any forgiveness, and that He who gave Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of all the world is latently present in every act of generous self-sacrifice.

It is our task in humility, in holy reverence for His world, in the kind of love for our fellow human beings that echoes the

love with which He loved us, and with the joy that is His special gift to His own, to take seriously what He is, what He has done, what He does, what He will do, and what He gives us when He lets us, His

frail brothers and sisters, eat His body and drink His blood and makes us thereby one with Him and with one another and with all those whom He has reconciled to God.

St. Louis, Mo.