CHURCH AND TABLE --
A PARTICIPATORY ECCLESIOLOGY FOR THE CONTEMPORARY
CHURCH

by

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ABSTRACT

The contemporary Church is faced with a crisis of identity and purpose due, in part, to its uncritical engagement with many postmodern ideals. The consequence, for many, is ecclesial amnesia. Through the dismissal of the primacy of the Christian Narrative the Church has begun to forget who it is and what it is called to be - a sacramental community who, through a kenotic and perichoretic faith in Christ, participates in God’s eschatological vision of shalom. The identity and purpose of the Church is rooted in such participation. Remembrance of identity and purpose is crucial for sacramentality to be had, something which can be accomplished through faithful reengagement with its Narrative. One of the primary means of doing so is through the Eucharist. The Eucharist offers the possibility to ground the Church in its identity and purpose, liturgically transforming it into the kind of people God calls it to be, people who are one, missional and holy - people who, through their very existence, make the Kingdom of God made known in the present. Through such participatory ecclesiology, grounded in the Eucharist, the Church can begin to remember and fulfil its calling of being the New Humanity.
“Most good things have been said far too many times and just need to be lived.”
- Shane Claiborne.

“We need fewer recipes and more cooks in the kitchen.”
- Miroslav Volf

For some of the best cooks I know:
Jobin, W.K., A.M., P.S., C.L., M.K., & M.A.

Thank you all for the part you have played in this: for the friendships, mentorship and affirmation, talking shop over food and drinks, copious amount of edits, support and prayers.

Go in peace, go in love, go and do it loudly.

The grace and peace of Christ to all of you.
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INTRODUCTION

The Christian Church exists within a story. It exists within the story of what the Creator God has done through Israel and is doing through Jesus Christ to restore creation back into its creational intent.¹ As followers of Christ and as the Christian Church we come to participate in that story through giving ourselves over to the way of Jesus Christ. As both individuals and as a community this story is central to our identity and purpose. It is through engaging with this story that we can come to know our original identity and purpose as part of creation, as humanity, and as the Church – the sacramental community embodying and pointing towards God’s present and still-coming kingdom. This formative story or ‘narrative’ is important for it has the ability to provide a framework within which to understand who we are and what our purpose might be.² If we dismiss this story or limit our engagement with it, we run the risk of losing a major referent that provides a sense of identity and purpose beyond ourselves and our immediate contexts. Through engaging with Christian Narrative we can grapple with understandings of such human existential questions of ‘who,’ ‘what,’ ‘where,’ ‘when,’ ‘why’ and ‘so what.’

A renewed emphasis on the importance of narrative is needed because postmodernism, the dominant cultural ethos of today, has the potential to remove or minimize the role of story and narrative from our discourse. As the Church, because story is integral to our identity and purpose, we would be well-advised to approach postmodernism critically. Such an approach is warranted as many contemporary

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¹ For the sake of clarification and consistency, when referring to the universal Church I will use ‘Church.’ When referring to individual or local congregations I will use ‘church.’
² For the sake of clarification and consistency, when I refer to the story from which the Church arose and participates in, I will use ‘Christian Narrative’ or ‘Narrative’ to, if nothing else, distinguish it from any other narratives discussed.
churches, perhaps because they have given themselves over to a thoroughly postmodern worldview, have minimized the importance of narrative or even dismissed the need for story, thereby finding themselves in a state of ecclesial amnesia.

While there may be other reasons for and solutions to the ecclesial amnesia that the contemporary Church is experiencing, it will be argued here that one solution is remembrance. This, however, is a very particular kind of remembrance, one modelled on the sacrament of the Eucharist. The Eucharist facilitates a remembrance that fosters a sense of identity, purpose, stability and passion for which much of the contemporary Church is yearning. The Eucharist can be seen to symbolize a particular form of ecclesiality and to contain the power to ground the Church in the Christian Narrative, thereby reminding the Church of its identity and purpose and liturgically transforming it into the passionate community it is called to be: a Church that is one, missional and holy – a sacramental community which through its whole existence points beyond itself to the truth and transformative power of Christ and God’s coming Kingdom. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to attempt to articulate a sacramental ecclesiology that rises out of the Eucharist as a constitutive practice for the contemporary Church.
CHAPTER ONE:
THE CHRISTIAN NARRATIVE

THE IMPORTANCE OF STORY

There is transformative power in story. Story can create, communicate, and inspire; it can affirm and challenge attitudes, traditions and norms, and it can shape individual and communal ideas of ethics, politics and self. The sheer prevalence of story within the various cultures of our world indicates the transformative power and function story contains.\(^3\) Whatever the medium or format, its ubiquity reveals the aetiological and epistemological role story plays within our societies.\(^4\) From the mundane to the profound, story offers coherence and cohesion within the worldviews of individuals and communities, enabling them to understand themselves, the world around them and discern their role within that world. It is these worldview constructing stories that we will refer to here as ‘narratives.’

When it comes to narrative the aetiological and epistemological scale is much broader than one would identify with just any particular story.\(^5\) With narrative, the cohesion and coherence those stories convey is scaled back to the universal, thereby

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\(^4\) The aetiological and epistemological aspect of story can be illustrated through the examples of myths and fairy tales. Fairy tales reveal how story is epistemological in that their traditional purpose was to convey knowledge. “Little Red Riding Hood,” for example, was originally a cautionary tale of going out in the woods alone. Knowledge of social norms and dangers were passed on through such stories. Similarly, biblical stories such as the Exodus are told during Passover because it is considered the defining story of the Jewish faith; knowledge surrounding identity, history and tradition are shared and passed on through the use of that particular story. Myths are an example of the aetiological role of story in that they convey the reasons things are the way they are. The Greek myth of Helios, for example, was used to explain how and why the sun rose and set. Whatever genre or medium used, or the scientific or historical veracity, story brings a sense of coherence and cohesion because it offers the means of understanding ourselves and the world we are in. See also Ruth Ronen and Efrat Biberman, “The Truth about Narrative; or How Does Narrative Matter?” *Philosophy and Literature* 30 (1) 2006: 118-139.

\(^5\) Ibid., 120.
providing answers to those core existential questions. Narrative moves beyond the immediate past and present circumstances to the universal or cosmological. As Ronen and Biberman argue, it is through narrative that individuals and communities find intelligibility to such grand and often overwhelming questions. “To lack such a narrative structure in one’s life is to lack any stable sense of personal identity, any sense of oneself as enduring through time as the same person, as one who can be the bearer of obligations and entitlements.”

Alasdair MacIntyre concurs, arguing that it is through aligning oneself with a narrative that one finds stability, orientation, identity and purpose; narrative acts as a binding agent against feelings of incoherence and displacement. In other words, it is through narrative that identity and purpose are constructed.

These narratives, often modified with the prefix ‘grand-’ or ‘meta-,’ have a sense of a beginning, middle and end; through the trajectory or plot and the (re)telling of the smaller stories which make up the larger narrative, ontological and epistemological foundations are established from which a worldview (and all the moral, social, political and spiritual understandings which come with it) can be derived. It is through engaging in a narrative that a worldview emerges, a framework from which individuals and communities can understand the world around them as well as their identity and purpose within that world. Narratives, while hermeneutically flexible, are a paradoxically fixed

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6 Ibid., 37.
7 As quoted in: John Lippitt, “Getting the Story Straight: Kierkegaard, MacIntyre and some Problems with Narrative,” Inquiry 50 (1) 2007: 44.
way of understanding the world and discerning one’s place within it. With the ability to bring coherence and cohesion, narratives and the traditions, stories and histories of which they are comprised, are of immense epistemological, aetiological and sociological importance. They bring comprehensive ways for understanding who we are, why things are the way they are, how things are to be ordered and a sense of the direction and progression of everything. By having a concrete sense of a beginning and end, the ascribing community is able to begin discerning what the ultimate telos or point of life may be and therefore attempt to align themselves with it. Narrative, then, as we will use it here, is a comprehensive way of understanding, communicating and participating in a universal milieu.

It is this sense of narrative to which I will appeal in this paper, and it is this sense of narrative to which I believe Christianity ascribes and out of which it arose. The Biblical Narrative of what God has done through Israel and is doing through Jesus Christ shapes the worldview of the Christian community, a community known as the Church. Without this specific Narrative, it can be argued that the Church has no basis for its identity and purpose. It is within that Narrative that the Church hears and remembers who

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9 This statement is not as contradictory as it may first appear. Being ‘fixed’ means that the narrative and the stories of which they are composed cannot be dismissed or ignored due to historical longevity and cultural recognition. It all must be engaged. However, regardless of that fixed nature, how those stories can be interpreted is another question; while the narrative itself is fixed, our interpretation - our hermeneutic - is ‘flexible,’ able to yield dramatically different meanings. The Biblical Narrative, one to which we shall turn shortly, is an example of this fixed yet flexible nature. If, for example, someone were to dismiss creation, the Exodus or Christ from the Biblical story it could be argued that what is being told is not the Biblical Narrative. Nevertheless, history has seen dramatically different interpretations of the Narrative, all of which arose from the same fixed source. The theological and traditional differences between Protestant denominations or between the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditions - not to mention feminist, liberationist, ecological or postcolonial interpretations - are enough to demonstrate this flexibility. Hermeneutical flexibility is therefore not at odds with the ‘fixed’ nature of narrative.

it is and what its purpose is. Narrative is thus an important aspect of Christian faith
formation. Stanley Hauerwas is mindful of the importance of the progression from
narrative to faith:

[The] narrative mode [of the Christian faith] is neither incidental nor
accidental to Christian belief. There is no more fundamental way to talk of God
than in a story. The fact that we come to know God through the recounting of
the story of Israel and the life of Jesus is decisive for our truthful understanding
of the kind of God we worship as well as the world in which we exist. Put
directly, the narrative character of our knowledge of God, the self, and the world
is a reality-making claim that the world and our existence in it are God’s
creatures; our lives, and indeed, the existence of the universe are but contingent
realities.\footnote{As Hauerwas further notes, Christian ethics “does not begin by emphasizing rules or principles,
but by calling our attention to a narrative that tells of God’s dealing with creation. To be sure, it is
a complex story with many different subplots and digressions, but it is crucial for us.” Our
narrative did not arise out of our ethic but our ethic and sense of identity and purpose arose out of
this narrative. Stanley Hauerwas, \textit{The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer on Christian Ethics} (Notre
Dame: University of Indiana Press, 1983), 25.}

Given the centrality of the narrative character of Christianity for the very emergence and
substance of the faith, it can be reasoned that it is equally important to the sustaining and
maintaining of the faith. In a culture such as today’s, a renewed emphasis on the
importance of the Christian Narrative is not unwarranted. Not only has the passing of
Christendom resulted in the marginalization of so many things Christian, but the rise of
postmodernism and its suspicion of narratives has contributed to a general malaise within
the Church regarding its identity and purpose.

Postmodernism has brought to bear on our society a reluctance toward and
suspicion of meta and foundational narratives. Replacing the perceived value of orienting
one’s life around a specific narrative is a new perception, one which finds freedom in the
limitless choice of, and even in the suspension of the need for, narratives and universal
truths. Postmodernism can be seen to have introduced a ‘condition’ to our culture which
is arguably detrimental to the Church to the extent that it seduces the Church into ecclesial amnesia – a communal disremembering of the very narrative that gives the Church its identity and purpose. Such amnesia brings instability as it rids the Church of that one thing which makes it unique.

**THE POSTMODERN CONDITION**

We live in an increasingly fast-paced and complex world. Globalization and the rise of mass social media and communications have made a world which once seemed so large and mysterious a very small place. News from places previously unheard of enters our homes daily. New ideas, perspectives and worldviews are routinely encountered due to the rise of never-before experienced diversity within our cities and schools. Such experiences often result in a systemic change and challenge to long-held practices, beliefs and traditions. Formerly simple labels such as ‘Canadian,’ ‘straight,’ ‘woman,’ and ‘Christian,’ once so definitive and encompassing, have become hyphenated, ‘hybridized,’ appended or thrown out all together, frequently deemed incapable of encapsulating the totality of one’s identity. While the literary and philosophical roots of postmodernism are important, I wish to focus on the socio-cultural implications and consequences insofar as these have created the need for a renewed eucharistic ecclesiology in the contemporary Church.  

Postmodernism, as I will define it here (acknowledging the plethora of definitions, implications and almost ‘Heisenbergian’ nature of it), is as Lyotard states: the

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12 For some of the literary and philosophical roots of postmodernism see the work of Lyotard, Foucault and Derrida, considered to be the fathers of postmodern thought. Their work has been applied to most major fields such as art, architecture, and theology.
incredulity towards all (meta)narratives. Postmodernism is a cultural milieu that arose out of a reaction against the dominance of modern notions of absolute truth, progress and scientific and technological certitude. The result was a widespread suspicion towards unwavering certainty – specifically, worldviews and narratives that assume or imply notions of absolute certitude and truth. Such suspicion and distrust includes the perception that absolutes inevitably lead to totalitarianism and oppression. This view leads to the postmodern argument that unchecked progress and systems of absolutes are intrinsically fraudulent and disastrous; power sought through unchecked technological advances and absolutist ideologies leads, without fail, to violence and oppression.

Postmodernism is a reaction against the ideal that humanity “could subject the world to greater and greater control.” Postmoderns only have to point to the Holocaust/Shoah and the Second World War to illustrate their claims. The use of gas chambers, Little Boy and Fat Man shattered any notion that human nature and technological progress was constructively evolving, beneficial and directing the world towards greater peace and harmony.

The consequence of such postmodern critique is evident in the culture of cynicism and suspicion towards all things fixed and final; as Edwards and Usher note, the postmodern world is one “where people have to make their way without fixed referents

15 Brian Walsh and Slyvia Keesmaat, Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2004), 17.
17 Smith, Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism, 21.
and traditional anchoring points. It is a world of rapid change, of bewildering instability, where knowledge is constantly changing and meaning floats.¹⁸ This dynamism exists because faith in traditional norms and fixed referents has been lost. The result is a greater incentive to explore other’s modes of self and knowledge, and search for meaning by aligning oneself with various parts of different narratives, as opposed to seeing the value in rooting ourselves in just one. This leads, however, to its own challenges and difficulties.

Lacking any unifying story, rational justifications and normative anchors, postmodern culture fills the boredom of our time with a carnival of worldview options and consumer directed faiths. An all-encompassing plurality of beliefs and perspectives are available for our tasting and consumption. Or perhaps we could just say we live in a mall culture: the carnival has simply moved indoors. And just as we mix and match our wardrobe items and culinary tastes at the mall, so also do we find it increasingly unproblematic to combine beliefs from various religious traditions into one faith. The imposition of one set of beliefs is seen to be a hegemonic move to close down other options. Post-modernism is about keeping your options open and not closing down new experiences, perspectives, rituals and beliefs without trying them out. If life is a carnival, then why not taste everything that is on offer? Being ‘all over the map’ would appear to be a postmodern virtue.¹⁹

As Walsh and Keesmaat illustrate, postmodernism has resulted in the freedom (and even encouragement) to dismiss traditional narratives and be open to trying out and experimenting with different combinations of whatever suits the individual’s or community’s perceptions. The consumerist aspect of postmodernism thus becomes clear. Postmodernism can result in a culture of insatiable consumption, with unending alternatives and a plurality of voices all vying for the right to be part of one’s reality. This

ambiguity has caused a great deal of difficulty and anxiety for our culture and society and is, arguably, detrimental for the Christian Church.\textsuperscript{20}

One problem with this postmodern culture lies in what Kenneth Gergen calls ‘social saturation,’ or what Walsh and Middleton describe as the ‘disappearing self.’\textsuperscript{21} Both terms describe the result of postmodern culture’s consumerist and carnival-esque atmosphere. Social saturation is the result of postmodern gluttony. It is the consequence of the over-indulgence and consumption of various aspects of various narratives, attitudes, cultures and perspectives, whereby one becomes so fragmented and destabilized that one’s core understanding of self and direction begins to fade away. As Gergen describes it, “instead of any clear alternative . . . social saturation provides us with a multiplicity of incoherent and unrelated languages of self . . . or to be more precise, we are left with an infinitely malleable self, capable of taking on an indefinite array of imprinted identities.”\textsuperscript{22} Postmodernism has brought us a culture of cyclical dismantle and repair whereby, once something becomes tired and boring, a new self can be invented or added to. This ultimately runs the risk of leaving individuals and communities without a clear idea of who they are, where they come from and where they are going. This destabilization can be seen across Western society and has influenced all social and cultural institutions, including the Christian Church.

The effect postmodernism has had on Christianity and the Church can be seen in a variety of ways, some positive, others more detrimental. The suspicion of all things absolute and the disregard of the primacy of narrative can be seen to be the antithesis of

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid; Walsh and Middleton, \textit{Truth is Stranger}, 52.
\textsuperscript{22} Gergen, \textit{The Saturated Self}, 7.
the very foundations of Christianity, and thus a great danger and challenge to the Church and Christian faith. However, while the tone toward postmodernism taken here is primarily critical, it needs to be acknowledged that postmodernism has also brought positive changes and constructive challenges to Christianity and the Church. The challenging of long-held, habitual beliefs, and hermeneutical and epistemological traditions has brought the possibility of a new sense of (re)discovery to the Church. This can be seen, in part, in much of the emergent church movement over the last decade. Brian McLaren, a voice of the emergent movement, with his popularization of Hans Frei’s notion of a ‘generous orthodoxy,’ is indicative of this new epistemology and hermeneutic as it intentionally moves within, outside and beyond traditional, denominational and dogmatic boxes in order to revisit and rehear the Gospel message for our time. There is a purposeful envisioning of “an approach to the Christian faith that move(s) beyond the views of knowledge and certainty that liberals and conservatives held in common.” This rejection of foundationalism and the move beyond rigid systematic categories and hermeneutics occurs by emphasising ecumenical similarities, done so with a desire for true dialogue and “a willingness to think through old questions in new ways that foster the pursuit of truth.” McLaren and company, as well as writers in other ecclesial circles such as Shane Claiborne, Diana Butler Bass, Donald Miller, and Ron

23 Smith, Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism, 18.
24 John R. Franke, “Foreward” in A Generous Orthodoxy: Why I Am ..., by Brian McLaren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 14. Much of my current thinking has been formed with the help of more “popular” theologians. Those mentioned above and throughout this paper, as well as Jim Wallis and others, have all been instrumental for me in asking the questions and reaching the conclusions I am beginning to put forth here. Popular theologians have a legitimate place within academic arenas insofar as they tend to take into account and intentionally emphasize how we interact with what we believe. Such a focus on praxis is, in my opinion, integral to any (academic or otherwise) theological discussion.
25 Ibid., 15.
Sider take advantage of the flexibility granted by postmodernism and use it in their own work and church praxis. Moreover, postmodernism has also brought a renewed desire to hear from previously less known or marginalized voices and has encouraged a genuine dialogue between formerly polarized groups who were frequently not on speaking terms. This desire is reflected in ecclesial and academic movements that rethink how mission, evangelism, and church might be carried out, especially in cross-cultural contexts. The work of David Bosh, Lamin Sanneh, the World Council of Churches, Sojourners, and The United Church of Canada’s work on increasing dialogue and understanding among Christians, Jews, Muslims, and Aboriginal peoples are indicative of the positive consequences of postmodernism. Such efforts are commendable in the Church, as they aim to correct centuries of oppressive, unloving and unjust multi-faith and inter-cultural relationships.

The negative consequences of postmodernism, however, if left unchecked by critique, can overshadow its positive contributions by leading to ecclesial amnesia. Diana Butler Bass notes that with postmodernism, and even as early as the Enlightenment, there arose a condition of ‘broken memories.’ Under the influence of postmodernism Western Christianity began to shy away from its narrative and history, perceiving it to be “too painful, too oppressive and too violent for emerging sensibilities of tolerance and equality. Better to forget than to remember. Many . . . [find themselves] secretly

[agreeing] with atheist Christopher Hitchens when he claims that ‘religion poisons everything.’”

Thus, in the hope that by distancing or removing themselves from such an ‘oppressive’ narrative and ‘violent’ history they would be accepted by a world increasingly sensitive to such values, many Christian communities began to intentionally orient themselves around postmodern ideals. Consequently, Christian communities, often opting to be more driven by socio-political issues than theological identity, have “thrown the baby out with the bathwater,” ridding themselves of a past and narrative, thus ending up with ecclesial amnesia. Butler Bass highlights this irony and danger in research which shows that many American churches exhibit traces of ecclesial amnesia in that they are desperately searching for a sense of their history, identity and purpose.

It is precisely this condition that Hauerwas addresses when he speaks about why the Narrative is central to the Christian faith and, we can add, the life of the Church. One solution being proposed in this paper is to rethink pastorally, liturgically and academically the importance of the Narrative to our faith through a eucharistic ecclesiology. If the Narrative is life-giving and central to the Church’s identity and purpose, it is through more deeply engaging with the Narrative that the Church might begin to reclaim its true identity and purpose.

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28 Ibid.
THE PARADOX OF NARRATIVE

Before we continue, a brief discussion on the recovery of narrative is needed. The recovery of the Christian Narrative cannot and should not happen simplistically through reasserting the Narrative into our liturgy and praxis; rather, it must be done with a great deal of forethought and sensitivity. In order to reclaim the Narrative as a central means of our ecclesial identity and purpose, the nature and relevance of narrative itself must be re-evaluated. Most importantly, this involves grasping what Walsh and Middleton call the ‘pharmacological nature’ of narrative.\(^{30}\) The term speaks of the potentiality embedded within narrative to be paradoxically both poison and remedy. Much of the reasoning for the dismissal of the Christian Narrative, it can be argued, is due to its poisonous or destructive potential. As noted earlier, history certainly points to this. We need look no further than within our immediate past and present to see how the Christian Narrative has been used in painful and exclusionary ways. The crusades against homosexuality, seen in such statements as those of Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson and Fred Phelps, reveal the ways in which churches have endorsed hostile actions towards specific communities and individuals based upon interpretations of various parts of scripture.\(^ {31}\) Other examples include actions within the Aboriginal Residential Schools program of the churches, and the loss of the indigenous growth of Christianity in places such as Africa and China due to the heavily westernized missionary and evangelical methodologies used by colonizing

\(^{30}\) Walsh and Middleton, *Truth is Stranger*, 84.

\(^{31}\) Jerry Falwell: ”[Homosexuals are] brute beasts . . . part of a vile and satanic system [that] will be utterly annihilated, and there will be a celebration in heaven.” As quoted in: Jim Hill & Rand Cheadle, *The Bible Tells Me So* (Minneapolis: Anchor Books, 1996), 69-70. Pat Robertson: “If the world accepts homosexuality as its norm and if it moves the entire world in that regard, the whole world is then going to be sitting like Sodom and Gomorrah before a Holy God. And when the wrath of God comes on this earth, we will all be guilty and we will all suffer for it.” As quoted on *The 700 Club* (9-6-1995).
Christians. Recognising that narratives are potentially dangerous is a legitimate point.\textsuperscript{32} However, that danger does not innately rest in the narratives themselves. The potentiality of narrative to be either poisonous or remedial lies within its very hermeneutical flexibility. The aforementioned examples reveal how narratives themselves can be in actuality neutral and their remedial and poisonous potential has everything to do with \textit{how} the narratives are used. This is an important clarification as we venture into the recovery of the Narrative and seek solutions around its reassertion in our liturgies and praxis.

Thus we would do well to go about the reassertion of the Christian Narrative with great sensitivity and self-reflection. Recognizing that the Narrative is not itself at fault for the Church’s unfortunate past, we must move to \textit{reengage} it, find its transformative power, and do so with a prayerful hermeneutic that is held accountable by postmodern systems of checks and balances, such as dialogue, ecumenism and generous orthodoxy. The remedial and constructive power of our Narrative can be unleashed if we properly engage it, letting it transform us – rather than the other way around. Paradoxically, the Church needs to meet its Narrative with the same rigor, suspicion, humility and surrender while continually placing it at the centre of its liturgy and praxis.

\textbf{AMNESIA AND THE NEED FOR MEMORY}

Integral to the concept of narrative and its recovery is the concept of memory. Narratives cannot perform their function if we do not remember and retell them. Without memory they cease to have any stabilizing and binding power. Sociologist Robert Bellah underscores the importance of ecclesial memory in that it is a collective memory that

\textsuperscript{32} Walsh and Middleton, \textit{Truth is Stranger}, 84.
constitutes a true community as it orients the community around a shared identity and purpose.\textsuperscript{33} The contemporary Church can be seen to be losing that sense of communal memory because, in the move towards a more postmodern worldview, it has lost touch with the very source on which it is founded. To relieve this ecclesial amnesia, the Church needs to remember.\textsuperscript{34} Memory and the ritualized practice of communal remembering offer a solution not only to the crisis of ecclesial amnesia, but also to the health and sustainability of the contemporary Church.

Walter Brueggemann, using the Israelite community as an example, shows how remembrance is crucial for fidelity. For an Israelite, without the memory of covenant and Exodus event there is no gratitude or ancestral linkage and thus no binding reason to align oneself with that specific narrative.

Where memory fails before amnesia and where fidelity gives way to self-indulgence, in that world there will be no thanksgiving, no acknowledgement that life is a gift; we are free to imagine it to be an achievement or a possession. . . . The dominant culture all around is one of self-indulgence without fidelity, manipulation without gratitude.\textsuperscript{35}

Without a sense of memory, the Church as much as Israel, loses the sense of identity and purpose derived from being made in God’s image (Gen 1:28) and being part of God’s covenantal people. Amnesia happens when self-indulgence and pride overshadow gratitude and fidelity, leading to a fragmented and fading sense of who we are and what our purpose is. Without memory, and without the consistent engagement to remember, which Brueggemann states is the basic function of worship, faith communities break

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 10.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 13.
\textsuperscript{35} Walter Brueggemann, \textit{Mandate to Difference: An Invitation to the Contemporary Church} (Minneapolis: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 135.
down. As a result, the Church, because it is a worshiping community built upon and constituted through the remembrance of that Narrative, risks ceasing to exist.

To combat this ecclesial amnesia the Christian Church must remember its story, regain a sense of worshipful gratitude, and foster liturgical remembrance in order to find and maintain a sense of identity and purpose. Struggling communities would do well to realize that ‘church’ is not merely a building or what takes place Sunday mornings but the name given to a community whose very identity and purpose are rooted in participation within a very specific story. It is this story we hear and enact during the Eucharist and, as Butler Bass and Brueggemann suggest, it is through this story that we become transformed.

**THE CHRISTIAN NARRATIVE, FROM THE BOOKENDS**

**CREATION**

Central to understanding the Christian Narrative is the understanding that where one begins a story and where one ends a story shapes and determines not only how the story is told, but how we participate within it. For the contemporary Church it is of vital importance to not only remember its founding narrative so as to anchor itself against

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36 The Narrative being discussed, particularly when dealing with the Hebrew scriptures, does not belong to the Christian faith alone but rather to all the Abrahamic traditions. To call it the ‘Christian Narrative’ is to signify the Christological and Trinitarian hermeneutic we bring to it.

37 Rob Bell, “The Importance of Beginning in the Beginning” Sermon. Mars Hill Bible Church. Grand Rapids, Mich. 08/16/09; N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection and the Mission of the Church* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2008), 5. Claus Westermann warns not to base too much of our theology on these initial chapters as more theological insight is shed on creation and ‘the fall’ throughout Scripture (ex: Deut 26:5-9, Psalm 136, Isaiah 44:24). Nevertheless, what is being attempted here is not a systematic theology but an effort to use Genesis 1-3 to gain an over-arching idea of the trajectory of the Biblical Narrative (Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1974), 1).
ecclesial amnesia, but also to attempt to remember the particular breadth and scope of the Narrative. When Genesis 1 through Revelation 22 is taken more fully into account, the Christian Narrative can be fully heard and the identity and purpose of the Church discerned. What I will attempt to do here is not to provide a comprehensive exegesis of the entire Bible but an abridged version as seen ‘from the bookends.’ Exegeting the Narrative by visiting the beginning and end will allow us to establish its trajectory and thereby establish insight into the overarching plot and theology of the Narrative.

The Judeo-Christian story of creation begins “in the beginning.” Genesis 1 and 2 are accounts, distinct but not divergent, of the creation of the universe. It is within these accounts that the beginning of time and history are described. They are not, as Goldsworthy points out, to be taken literally, nor as meaningless poetry; rather, they are meant to establish a framework for how we are to interpret world history. Consequently, Genesis 1 and 2 are ontological and therefore aetiological and epistemological in that they convey the creational intent of God and give metaphysical parameters for how we are to understand created life. Genesis 1 and 2 were never intended to be seen as a literal description of the actual creation of the cosmos but rather as a poetic description of why this world exists and what its purpose is. Here one is provided with insight into creation’s intended direction, and how it is to function and be ordered. The assumptions inherent in these introductory chapters, as Westermann points out, has an impact on our understanding of what takes place throughout the rest of the Pentateuch, and we can add, the rest of Christian scripture. Thus, the creation accounts

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establish the narrative character in the sense discussed above. While the accounts exist within the specific context of the Abrahamic traditions, the claims and truths found within the Narrative are not confined to the borders of those communities. The assumptions established here in the beginning extend beyond the immediate context to the universal.\textsuperscript{40} Peters calls this a ‘cosmogonic myth’ as what is being set forth here and throughout the rest of scripture is a narrative intended to bring forth a coherent and comprehensive universal worldview.\textsuperscript{41}

The Judeo-Christian Narrative begins with the Creator God speaking the cosmos into existence \textit{ex nihilio}. Not only does the assertion \textit{ex nihilio} emphasize the sovereignty of God, but also that creation exists\textit{ apart from} the Creator, therefore safeguarding against pantheistic interpretations of God and creation. While that is of theological significance, the beauty of \textit{ex nihilio} is that it reveals a Creator God who is intimately involved with creation.\textsuperscript{42} This intimacy can be seen in the fact that creation is ‘spoken’ into existence. God creates by \textit{speaking} creation into being, betraying a level of intimacy, will, desire, forethought, planning and love.

This intentionality is a crucial aspect of Genesis 1-2. The cadence and meter found in the repetition of ‘And God said …’ (Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26) conveys a purpose or creational intent, while the chorus of ‘And God saw that it was good’ (vv. 4, 10, 12, 18, 25, 31) affirms that what was made was spoken in accordance with some preconceived divine intent. As Robert Jenson states, creation coming into being through ‘word’ (\textit{logos}) is to be “interpreted as an immanent act of the Father’s will.”\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 2.
\textsuperscript{42} Goldsworthy, \textit{According to Plan}, 91.
\textsuperscript{43} Jenson, \textit{The Works of God}, 6.
theological thrust of Genesis 1 then, and indeed of the creation account at large, is that creation has a divinely initiated purpose; it was created to go somewhere. This creational intent and purpose is affirmed by the fact that the creation accounts do not portray a perfect or finished creation. There is, rather, embedded within creation a ‘progressive generativity.’ The third day of creation illustrates this generativity well:

Then God said, ‘Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with seed in it. And it was so. And the earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it.

Creation is endowed with dasha, the ability to ‘produce’ and ‘grow,’ meaning that “built into creation is a nuclear life-giving ability to create more.” Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry refer to this as the fecundity of nature. Frethiem and Welker concur, stating that embedded within creation is a process of revitalization through interdependent relationships and without which creation would have no enduring existence. Jenson underscores this as well:

Creation is imperatively directed to those creatures that are teleological in their own being, that manifest and are sustained by striving, by pursuit of a determinate end. The world is not a dead apparatus in which a few living beings happen to find themselves; it is a garden and pasture of living beings, which the cosmic and atomic and chemical systems make possible – and this is true even if the tiny speck Earth is the only home of life in the vast system.

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44 Rob Bell, “The Importance of Beginning in the Beginning.”
45 Gen 1:11-12.
46 Bell, “The Importance of Beginning in the Beginning.”
47 Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, The Universe Story (San Francisco: Harper, 1994).
48 Michael Welker, “Creation and the Image of God: Their Understanding in Christian Tradition and their Biblical Grounds,” Journal of Ecumenical Studies 34 (3) 1997: 443; Terence Frethiem, “Preaching Creation: Genesis 1-2,” Word and World 29 (1) 2009: 78, 80. “In creating, God not only acts but reacts, responding to that which has been created. In creating, God confronts the independence, the novelty, and even the need for completion of that which has been created. . . . Reaction, perception, evaluation, naming, separating intervention, and the act of making space for the human being’s own activity . . . all belongs to creation” (Welker, “Creation and the Image of God,” 442).
49 Jenson, The Works of God, 15; Goldsworthy, According to Plan, 93.
Creation therefore is not static and finished but is organic, dynamic and empowered. The primary message of Genesis 1-2, the introduction to the Christian Narrative, reveals creation as a purposefully unfinished act of an invested and loving God.

This generative and fecund nature of creation is not a failure on God’s part but a very intentional characteristic that provides an insight into God’s creational intent and telos. We can state that creation is purposefully unfinished and do so without calling into question God’s attention to detail precisely because God declares the unfinished creation ‘good’ (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 25, 31). ‘Good’ here is not to be understood as ‘perfect,’ nor as ‘mediocre’ or ‘not great,’ as contemporary parlance often conveys. Rather, as the Hebrew word ‘tovv’ suggests, ‘good’ is to be interpreted as ‘as intended,’ ‘according to plan,’ ‘right,’ ‘beautiful,’ or as Jenson translates, ‘good for’ some ultimate purpose.50 Tovv means “correspondent with divine intention.” God called creation thus because God observed, right at the very beginning, a “decisive continuity between God’s intention and the creational intent.”51 When God declares the creation ‘tovv,’ God is proclaiming ‘everything is going as I intend’ or, as Goldsworthy states, “everything in creation relates perfectly, that is, as God intends it should, to everything else and to God himself.”52 Bonhoeffer follows:

That God’s creation is good in no way means the world is the best of all conceivable worlds. It means that the world lives completely in the presence of God, that it begins and ends in him and that he is its Lord. Here is meant the goodness which is undifferentiated from evil, whose goodness consists in being under the dominion of God.53

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51 Fretheim, “Preaching Creation,” 80.
52 Goldsworthy, According to Plan, 99.
The affirmation found in these blessings indicates that the state of creation, the order and harmony amongst creation and Creator, was according to God’s creational intent.\textsuperscript{54} The creation account of Genesis, therefore, is not meant to be, nor should be taken as, either a literal or meaningless description of creation. Genesis 1-2 is, first and foremost, a theological statement that: God made the cosmos with distinct qualities; that in the beginning things were as they were intended to be; and most importantly, creation was meant to go somewhere, it was meant to become something.\textsuperscript{55} How humanity fits into this creation reveals more about the telos of God’s creational intent and how that telos is to be achieved.

**HUMANITY**

In what many major biblical scholars recognize as a significant break in the meter and cadence of the creation account, thereby signalling to a crescendo of importance, is the creation of humanity.\textsuperscript{56} The difference in attention to detail within Gen 1:26-28 from the rest of creation account is enough to indicate that something special and unique is taking place with the creation of humanity; the mere fact that humanity is declared ‘very tovv’ is a hint towards their privileged place and role amongst creation.\textsuperscript{57} Scholarship on humanity and \textit{imago dei} is extensive and includes explorations of sexuality, politics, morality and spirituality. What is important for our purposes here is how the address given to humanity in vv. 28-30 informs humanity’s identity and purpose.\textsuperscript{58} The address the Creator gives humanity describes their purpose as one of ‘ruling’ and ‘subduing’

\textsuperscript{54} Westermann, \textit{Genesis}, 87.
\textsuperscript{55} Bonhoeffer, \textit{Creation and Fall}, 30.
\textsuperscript{57} Fretheim, “Preaching Creation,” 79.
\textsuperscript{58} Gen 1:26-30. The nature of the \textit{imago dei} has been debated throughout history; for an exploration of this see Welker’s “Creation and the Image of God” p. 445-447; Westermann, \textit{Genesis}, p.148-155 and Goldsworthy, \textit{According to Plan}, p.96.
Humanity’s purpose is one of stewardship. To ‘rule’ (rada) and to ‘subdue’ (kabosh) are positions of power, decision-making and leadership, indicating that within this generative and unfinished creation humanity’s identity and purpose is to be leading, orienting and sustaining it towards God’s creational telos.\(^59\)

The duties of rada and kabosh, however, cannot mean arbitrarily ordering creation according to any ideology or preference. The ruling and subduing must be done with the same love and subsequent forethought and will with which God made the world; anything else would be a departure from the image and likeness in which they were made. Humanity’s identity and purpose is bound up in that divine appointment as stewards or ‘co-creators’ amongst God’s generative creation. The imago dei provides an overarching paradigm with which to understand what it means to be a human-being. Being human is all about participating in the rada and kabosh of God’s world. It is participation in the stewarding of God’s world in a fashion representing a loving Creator. This participation is at the root of what makes these ‘high’ creatures ‘human;’ it speaks “of human existence . . . as blessed by God, who in his sovereign freedom has ruled that the human being alone out of all his creatures is to be his counterpart and correspond to him, and with whom he will speak and share and who in turn must talk to him and live in his presence.”\(^60\) The imago dei, then, governs the purpose of humanity (to be co-creators with God and live a life in service of God’s creational telos) and their identity (as creatures who have an intimate relationship with the Creator, are included in the discourse of the triune God and whose very being is derived from that aforementioned

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\(^{59}\) Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 94.

\(^{60}\) Westermann, *Genesis*, 151.
Humanity is only truly humanity when it is living into this identity and purpose.

Genesis 2 retells and affirms the thrust of Genesis 1, but does so through a story of human archetypes, Adam and Eve. Taking place within the garden of Eden, a protological ideal world, a world described as a bountiful place (v.9) with two trees, the tree of life and tree of the knowledge of good and evil (v.9), and as a place where humanity would reign with God (v.19-21). Eden was the garden of God, and God’s presence was the central aspect of the garden. That Eden is customarily understood in later biblical imagery as the earthly centre where God was to be found is clear from Isaiah 51:3 where Eden and the garden of Yahweh are paralleled. Again, as in Genesis 1, what was created was good and as God designed.

As with the first creation account, present here is the notion of progressive and participatory generativity. This can be seen more clearly through Dumbrell’s paralleling of Eden with ancient Middle Eastern concepts of royal gardens. Royal gardens in the ancient Middle East were seen as valued and ‘fenced in’ places tended to by kings for the enjoyment of others. By connecting this sense of a garden with the garden portrayed in Genesis 2 and with the Genesis 1 concepts of progressive and participatory generativity,

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61 The concept of ‘freedom’ comes into play here; a biblical understanding of freedom does not mean freedom carte-blance. Rather, it refers to the idea that humans are most free when they live into that creational intent. As Gen 1:28 points out, humanity has the capabilities to make real choices with real consequences.
62 Reign comes from ‘to participate with.’
63 William J. Dumbrell, “Genesis 2:1-17: A Foreshadowing of New Creation,” in Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect, edited by Scott J. Hafemann (Downers Grove: IVP Academic: 2002), 61. “For the Lord will comfort Zion; he will comfort all her waste places, and will make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song”(Isa 51:3).
64 The Hebrew for garden ‘gan’ conveys a ‘specific and fenced in or enclosed garden’ (Dumbrell, “Genesis 2:1-17,” 56.)
Dumbrell makes an interesting inference. The garden of Eden is to be tended to and cultivated (i.e., expanded) for the world to enjoy. The surrounding world around Eden needs to be brought into the garden . . . by expanding and dominion we see God wanting to grow the garden. The verbs used ‘abad’ and ‘shamar’ (to cultivate, work, serve) in Gen 2:15 also have liturgical and doxological overtones, as it is the proper response to God’s creation and role as humanity.

Dumbrell is showing how humanity’s role within creation has to do with expanding God’s creation through abad and shamar, parallel tasks to those of rada and kabosh. Most importantly, Dumbrell shows how these roles are not inherent or natural but arise out of response to God’s grace and the work God has begun. The liturgical overtones here should not be ignored as this sets the stage for understanding (in the same spirit as Isaiah 58 and Matthew 25) that it is through this liturgical response that humanity achieves its fullest expression. This expression, because it is a response to the Creator, is therefore an act of worship; it is the acknowledgement of what God began as worthy of praise and devotion. Humanity and creation, then, are liturgically oriented. As Marcus Mumford writes:

Love it will not betray you
dismay or enslave you, it will set you free
to be more like the man you were made to be.
There is a design, an alignment, a cry
of my heart to see,
the beauty of love as it was made to be.

Love, Mumford implies, is an essential characteristic of worshipful living. Love leads humanity into its creational identity and purpose. It is in and through love that the Creator’s design and purpose for creation manifests. Creation is made for worship and

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this worship, as Isaiah 58 and Matthew 25 suggest, is not just through song, fasting and prayer, but through lives of love which produce justice, peace and harmony.\(^{67}\)

**SHALOM**

As previously stated, there is present among these creation accounts the assumption that what was created was blessed and seen as appropriate for God’s creational purposes. We can now expand on this. The world is declared *tovv* because the state of the world falls within the grand vision of God, what the Bible calls *shalom*. Broadly put, *shalom* is the term for the central vision portrayed in the Bible in which creation “is one, every creature in community with every other, living in harmony and security toward the joy and well-being of every other.”\(^{68}\) As Brueggemann states:

> the persistent vision of joy, well-being, harmony and prosperity is not captured in any single word or idea in the Bible; a cluster of words is required to express its many dimensions and subtle nuances: love, loyalty, truth, grace, salvation, justice, blessing, righteousness. But the term that in recent discussions has been used to summarize that vision is *shalom*.

*Shalom* is the term for the vision of God, a vision that will define reality in the creational telos.

We have already seen how the first two chapters of Genesis portray creation as unfinished, intended to be generatively progressing towards its telos with the stewardship of humanity. *Shalom*, because it is God’s vision for the world, defines the divine direction with which humanity is to guide its stewardship.

The biblical vision of *shalom* functions always as a firm rejection of values and lifestyle that seek security and well-being in manipulative ways at the expense of another part of creation, another part of the community, or a brother or sister. The vision of the biblical way affirms that communal well-being comes by living

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\(^{67}\) This liturgical and doxological connection will be expanded upon later.

God’s dream, not by idolatrous self-aggrandizement. The alternative is to so distort creation as never to know what it means to celebrate the Sabbath. Either we strive to secure our own existence or we celebrate the joy and rest of Sabbath, knowing that God has already secured it for us.\(^69\)

As Brueggemann points out, *shalom* is God’s vision for the world which humanity is capable of participating in if they choose to live a life of worship as portrayed succinctly in Micah 6:8.\(^70\) *Shalom* is the result of that liturgical orientation that is portrayed as the state of things in the very beginning. *Shalom* is present when all is according to God’s divine intent, when creation ebbs and flows in loving and harmonious order.

In this sense, *shalom* leads us to another very important insight within the Christian Narrative. Within the first two chapters of the Bible there is absolutely no attempt made to distinguish between heaven and earth in a spatial or spiritual sense. There is no indication that the eschatological and soteriological goal of creation or humanity is escape from earth to ‘somewhere else.’ Rather, heaven and earth are depicted as the same place. Unlike Platonic influenced theology that sees an intrinsic dualism between heaven and earth, these creation accounts portray heaven, if we are true to the text and Judaic thought, as a state of earthly creation; heaven is a vibrant and active earth, one perfectly synchronized with God’s creational intent, one where *shalom* is present.\(^71\)

This cannot be underscored, for it dramatically alters our eschatology and soteriology, something to which I will return shortly. To summarize the introductory ‘bookend’ of Genesis 1-2 is to state that in the beginning God created a world for the distinct purpose of building a place where *shalom* would be present between and amongst God and all created things and where humanity would play a central role.

\(^{69}\) Ibid., 19.

\(^{70}\) “He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8).

\(^{71}\) Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 20.
REVELATION AND RESTORATION

Looking to the other ‘bookend’ of the Bible, Revelation 21 and 22, the imagery and themes bear a striking resemblance to Genesis 1 and 2. It is here we find John’s prophetic description of what Jesus described as the ‘Kingdom of God,’ the divine eschatological reality foreshadowed throughout scripture. Revelation 21-22 speaks of heaven and earth as a radiant city where God and humanity dwell (21:9-14) with a bright river (22:1-2) running between the two trees of life (22:2). These last two chapters speak of a place where shalom envelopes creation (21:3-4). These images should, and would have to its original audience, be reminiscent of the Genesis accounts. What we see in John’s vision is the creational telos of the Creator, what we would commonly call ‘heaven.’ But again, what is being described is not other-worldly but the same creation described in Genesis. What is put forth in Revelation is the conclusion of the Christian Narrative.

This can be seen through the continuity between what was put forth in the beginning and what is being seen at the end. As Bell points out, what is seen in Revelation 21-22 is the result of that progressive generativity described in Genesis 1-2: “What is a city but a gathering and collection of a large number of gardens.” Revelation 21-22 is a vision of the created world having reached God’s creational telos. “Prominent among the descriptions of the city and its life are these: that death will be no more (21:4), and that everything less than the full, rich, human life intended by the creator god is banished, cast into the lake of fire (21:8).” As Wright goes on to state, concurring with

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72 Bell, “The Importance of Beginning in the Beginning.”
Bell, this city is the culmination of that thriving and generative creation described in Genesis. The eschatological vision put forth by John is one of a world where heaven and earth are intertwined, where God and humanity reign according to divine intent, and \textit{shalom} is manifest because the central vision of God is realized. But there is, however, something amiss if we read these passages exactly parallel to the Genesis text. The underlying theme of restoration found throughout Rev 21:1-5 should give us pause, for in order for something to be ‘restored’ or ‘made new’ something had to have gone wrong.

The Kingdom account in Revelation is replete with the theme of restoration, something we would not expect to see if the creational intent of God had gone as planned. The phrases ‘new heaven and new earth’ (21:1), ‘new Jerusalem’ (v.2) along with the ‘rejoining’ of heaven and earth (v. 3) and the arrival of a new order (v.5) emphasize the resolution of some sort of unnamed conflict. This begs attention, for in order for creation to be restored something serious had to have happened between the trees of Genesis 1-2 and Revelation 21-22, something which separated the heavens and earth and disrupted \textit{shalom}, thus requiring a divine restoration of the creational intent of God. It is the resolution of this tension that makes up the bulk of the Christian Narrative.

To see where within the Narrative the break with God’s plan begins we again go back to the beginning.

\footnote{Ibid., 476.}

\footnote{Scott defines restoration as ‘the attempt of individuals or groups in a society to re-establish in whole or in part earlier conditions . . . that prevailed before a major change took place, such as an overthrow or revolution. (James M. Scott, “Jesus’ Vision for the Restoration of Israel as the Basis for Biblical Theology of the New Testament,” in \textit{Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect}, edited by Scott J. Hafemann (Downers Grove: IVP Academic: 2002), 132.}
SIN AND EXILE

Genesis 3 introduces the tension in the Narrative and the shift away from the created reality of God through the introduction of sin. Genesis 3, often referred to as ‘The Fall,’ is the articulation of the falling away from God’s created reality and the beginning of a new reality – one antithetical to the order and intent of Genesis 1 and 2. It is a reality, as the Narrative goes, that we continue to experience today.\(^76\) The third through eleventh chapters of Genesis describe what Westermann calls a ‘crescendo of sin’ and Claiborne and Haw see as the ‘ugly inaugural acts of civilization:\(^77\) the disobedience of Adam and Eve (Gen 3), the fratricide of Cain (Gen 4), and the tower of Babel (Gen 11), to name a just few examples. What this crescendo articulates is the emergence of an alternative reality. The expulsion from Eden symbolizes this break insofar as the two realities are antithetical to each other.\(^78\) Sin is a major theme of the Christian Narrative and to understand the Narrative we must understand the nature of sin and its affect on the created reality.

Our understanding of sin dramatically influences our understanding of the problem within the Christian Narrative, how the story unfolds and our Christology and ecclesiology. Sin can understood as a disruption of *shalom*.\(^79\) Sin cannot be understood in a strictly moral sense because it is much broader. Sin as a disruption of *shalom* is an action that is in contradiction to both God’s creational intent and our identity and purpose.


\(^{77}\) Westermann, *Genesis*, 53; Shane Claiborne and Chris Haw, *Jesus for President: Politics for Ordinary Radicals* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 27.

\(^{78}\) Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, 105.

\(^{79}\) Bell, “The Importance of Beginning in the Beginning.”
as stewards of that intent.\textsuperscript{80} Sin is a condition that occurs when the responsibilities inherent within the \textit{imago dei}, those of \textit{rada} and \textit{kabosh}, are twisted according to one’s own purposes, thereby acting as a rebuke and challenge to God’s authorship and a denial of our participation in God’s story.\textsuperscript{81}

The doxological and liturgical implications of sin arise here. God’s desired worship, as previously discussed, is that of love displayed through complete devotion to the vision of \textit{shalom}, rather than to one’s own purposes. In this sense, sin stems from misplaced ascription of worth, which ultimately leads to idolatry and living outside God’s vision. The prophetic challenges seen throughout the Old Testament speak to this kind of diversion away from \textit{shalom}, where such things as self-interest, personal gain and ego have come to govern and structure life and human motivation. The intended audience of such passages as Amos 5:21-27, Isaiah 58, and Micah 6:8 are all those living idolatrous lives, rather than the kind expected by God. As Reinhold Niebuhr would put it, sin is the human inability to live as worshipful creatures. The insecurity from that relationship results in a will-to-power which overreaches the limits of human creatureliness. Man [sic] is ignorant and involved in the limitations of a finite mind; but he pretends that he is not limited. He assumes that he can gradually transcend finite limitations until his mind becomes identical with universal mind. All of his intellectual and cultural pursuits, therefore, become infected with the sin of pride. Man’s pride and will-to-power disturb the harmony of creation. . . . The religious dimension of sin is man’s rebellion against God, his effort to usurp the place of God. The moral and social dimension of sin is injustice. The ego which falsely makes itself the centre

\textsuperscript{80} Goldsworthy, \textit{According to Plan}, 105; “The Christian story trains us to see that in most of our life we act as if this is not God’s world and therein lies our fundamental sin. Moreover, when we act, we find that our actions have far-reaching consequences, in effect we distort our own and the world’s nature. Therefore sin implies not just a claim about human behaviour but a claim about the way things are” (Hauerwas, \textit{The Peaceable Kingdom}, 30).

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 31.
of existence in its pride and will-to-power inevitably subordinates other life to its will and thus does injustice to other life.  

This disruption of *shalom* began as humanity broke away from God’s creational intent to begin their own endeavour.

As Westermann states, it is not the progress humanity achieved but rather the intent and direction of that progression which disrupted the intentions of the Creator. Put another way, it was humanity’s lack of identification and engagement with the Narrative that led them down the wrong path; sin arose when humanity began to disengage from God’s vision. The new intent and direction, the loss of conviction found by a lack of adherence to the Narrative, skewed the ‘potentialities’ of humanity rendering them incompatible with the original path of God.

The Fall had left people ‘like God’ in that they had the power to make decisions by which the course of their lives and their world was to be determined. But since they were unlike God as well, they did not have the ability to ensure that their decisions would be right in themselves or the assurance that such decisions would promote the right consequences. . . . Unable to administer their charge, humans’ mismanagement, neglect, and exploitation only served to accentuate, increase, and sharpen the inherent problems of the natural world over which they were charged to expend their energies as stewards of creation.

The story of the tower of Babel is especially revealing and representative of this brokenness and condition.

The building of the city and tower is an expression of powerful human impulses. . . . This ancient story encapsulates a recurrent human dream of a universal human community living in peace and freedom, no longer at the mercy of an inhospitable or hostile nature, and enjoying a life no longer solitary, nasty, poor, brutish and short. The universal city is the bearer and embodiment of this dream. According to the story, however, God finds this dream a nightmare. . . . From

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83 Westermann, *Genesis*, 61. Goldsworthy continues in this vein stating that sin results in a human condition “that is less than human because it no longer consists primarily in a relationship with God that is characterized by love and trust.” (Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, 105).
84 Dumbrell, “Genesis 2:1-17,” 64.
God’s point of view, the city of man is, in its deepest meaning, at best a form of idolatry, and at worst, a great threat to the earth.\(^85\)

Again, as Kass points out, the problem exposed from Genesis 3 onward is how the harmonious hierarchy and doxological orientation seen in Genesis 1-2 has reversed. The statement ‘let us make a name for ourselves’ (Gen 11:4) encompasses this posture. To “‘make a name for oneself’ is to remake the meaning of one’s life so that it is deserving of a new name. To change the meaning of human beings is to remake the content and character of human life. . . . The children of man (Adam) remake themselves, and thus, their name, in every respect taking the place of God.”\(^86\) As sin disrupts shalom and therefore the intended reality of God for the world, sin consequently creates a new reality, one antithetical to God’s, one we could be so bold as to label ‘hell.’\(^87\) As this reality is one of sin, evil emerges.

Evil . . . consists . . . in the rebellious idolatry by which human worship and honour elements of the natural world rather than the God who made them. The result is that the cosmos is out of joint. Instead of humans being God’s wise vice-regents over creation, they ignore the creator and try to worship something less demanding, something that will give them a short-term fix of power or pleasure. The result is that death, which was always part of the natural transience of good creation, gains a second-dimension, which the Bible sometimes calls ‘spiritual death.’\(^88\)

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\(^{86}\) Ibid., 51.

\(^{87}\) The boldness of this claim warrants qualification. I do not mean ‘hell’ in the traditional-Paradise Lost sense of the term. This relies on another dualistic philosophy that sees ‘hell’ as separate from earth in the same way heaven is seen as separate. In the Narrative as I have articulated it, hell, like heaven, cannot be seen as a separate sphere of existence. If the Bible describes ‘heaven’ as this earth when shalom reigns and if sin has caused a negation of that ‘heavenly’ status bringing to fruition an earthly state antithetical to it, then hell cannot be anything else but this world devoid of shalom. Such an argument can be helpful, once removed from the traditional baggage and imagery of ‘hell.’

\(^{88}\) Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 95. It is important to note that by ‘honouring elements of the natural world’ Wright is speaking of the worship of such elements, or idolatry.
Evil results when humanity ignores the creational intent of their Creator and has begun to do things their own way according to their own purposes. Through the acts of Adam, Eve, Cain, and Babel a new reality came into existence, one where evil is as pervasive as *shalom* was before. The old reality is not destroyed nor is the inherent ‘goodness’ of creation, anymore than the ‘goodness’ of humanity; it is simply that, in sin, one lives outside of *shalom*.  

The writers of the Bible articulate this alternative reality and disruption of *shalom* through the language of exile. ‘Exile’ is an appropriate motif insofar as sin has led to the removal of humanity from life as God intended it. This exilic motif can be seen throughout the Old Testament. Beginning in Genesis 3 there is a continuous ‘eastward’ movement away from Eden, that symbolic garden of *shalom*. Upon disobeying God Adam and Eve are expelled at the ‘eastern’ end of Eden (Gen 3:24) and Cain, upon his crime of fratricide, went to the land of Nod, *east* of Eden (Gen 4:16). “The writer or writers of Genesis keep returning to this eastward metaphor, insisting that something has gone terribly wrong with humanity, and that from the very beginning humans are moving in the wrong direction.”

There is a rapid, dramatic progression from Adam and Eve to their sons. We’ve gone quickly from eating fruit to murder in one generation. Things are falling apart very quickly. . . . The escalation of societal violence is so intense that a close relative of Cain’s says things are eleven times worse than they were before. And then by chapter six of Genesis . . . we find out that the whole world is headed for destruction except for one man and his family. And then by chapter eleven,

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89 Fretheim, “Preaching Creation,” 80.
90 This understanding of sin and hell is important in arguing against any theologies which see humanity or material as evil. Sin does not support the idea that material or humanity are inherently evil, but rather that humanity is broken, lost, or ‘exiled,’ trapped in systematic cycles of rebellion against God’s created order.
91 Rob Bell and Don Golden, *Jesus Wants to Save Christians: A Manifesto for the Church in Exile* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 13. This is strictly a metaphorical movement.
92 Ibid.
people have gotten together to build a tower that they are convinced will make them gods.\textsuperscript{93}

What is being described is the beginning of a new state of humanity, one which emerged from that initial disruption of \textit{shalom} and which lacks \textit{shalom} on every level.\textsuperscript{94} Exile is the consequence of amnesia; it is the biblical word for “what happens when you still have power and the wealth and influence and yet in some profound way you’ve blown it because you’ve forgotten why you were given it in the first place.”\textsuperscript{95} Jon Foreman’s \textit{Equally Skilled} speaks to this feeling of disorientation and exile:

\begin{quote}
How miserable I am.
I feel like a fruit-picker
who arrived here
after the harvest.
There's nothing here at all.
Nothing at all here
that could placate my hunger.
The godly people are all gone.
There's not one honest soul left alive
here on the planet.
We're all murderers and thieves
setting traps here
for even our brothers.

And both of our hands
Are equally skilled
At doing evil, equally skilled
At bribing the judges
Equally skilled
At perverting justice
Both of our hands
Both of our hands.\textsuperscript{96}
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\item \textsuperscript{93} Ibid., 25.
\item \textsuperscript{94} Ernst Jennu and Claus Westermann, \textit{The Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament}, Volume III (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997), 1343.
\item \textsuperscript{95} Bell and Golden, \textit{Jesus Wants to Save Christians}, 44.
\item \textsuperscript{96} Jon Foreman, “Equally Skilled” \textit{Limbs and Branches} CD (San Diego: Lowercase People, 2008).
\end{footnotes}
As the lyrics illustrate, humans, having developed the capacity to do evil, moved away from participation in *shalom* to participation in sin. Exile is the word for what happens when one forgets one’s story. Exile describes the departure from one reality and the establishment of another, defined by the reality from which it is removed. Exile is a main internal theme within the Christian Narrative. It depicts how humanity and creation are in a state of sin-induced separation from God’s world because humanity ignored, and later forgot, its creational identity and purpose, and in so doing created an alternate reality, one in which they are strangers in an alternate world and strangers to God’s will and purpose. They have lost sight of or failed to remember the Creator’s intent.

The solution to exile is not as simple as returning home, for it is not simply a geographical sense of exile. To return to God’s world and once again participate as stewards of the earth, humanity must remember its creational identity and purpose; hence exile’s connection to amnesia. The relationship between memory and exile is a crucial one. The world, the Biblical Narrative suggests, is in a state of exile because it has lost its collective memory around God’s creational intent and therefore has failed to live into that purpose. Remembrance is the remedy for exile. It is when humanity remembers their creational identity and purpose that they can once again participate in *shalom* and bring creation back into order and harmony with the Creator. Between the trees of Genesis and Revelation is the story of God trying get humanity to remember that vision of *shalom* and how they are created for it.

Indeed, much of the story of Israel, and arguably all of their rituals, are rooted in *anamnesis*, the liturgical remembrance of who they are within God’s creational reality.98

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97 Bell and Golden, *Jesus Wants to Save Christians*, 45.
98 *Anamnesis* translates literally as ‘the loss of forgetfulness,’ ‘recollection,’ ‘remembering.’
The primary agenda of the major and minor prophets was to remind Israel of their wayward direction and call them to repentance and return to that original identity and purpose.\textsuperscript{99} The prophets attempted to reengage Israel with their narrative thereby causing them to remember their identity as God’s chosen people and provide a source of hope during times of great upheaval and political instability, times when it is all too easy to conform to other narratives, agendas and realities. The accounts of Israel reveal how God intends humanity to engage and participate in creation and the political, social, economic and spiritual expectations of that participation.\textsuperscript{100} And when it comes to Christianity, it is believed that in order to achieve restoration, God came to humanity in the person of Jesus Christ; it is Christ who reminds humanity of their identity and purpose and draws the world back into God’s creational intent, sparking the restoration of the creational telos described in Revelation.

JESUS CHRIST

The Christian faith understands Jesus Christ as the central means of restoration,\textsuperscript{101} it is believed that God’s reconciliatory work, first witnessed through Israel, is expanded to all of creation and completed through Christ. Through Christ the world can be brought back to its creational intent, exile can be ended and the tension introduced in Genesis 3 resolved, bringing to fulfillment God’s promises with the arrival of that eschatological

\textsuperscript{99} Amos 3:1, 9-10; 5:23; 8:4-6; and Isaiah 1:15; 28 are examples of such a role.
\textsuperscript{100} Admittedly, the foregoing is a generalized representation of Israel and the Old Testament. It is not my intention to dismiss the Old Testament in any sort of supersessionist manner. It is, rather, intended as a cursory summary of the content for the purposes of this brief analysis.
\textsuperscript{101} The details of who Jesus is and how he brings about this restoration is, of course, up for debate, depending upon one’s soteriological and Christological understandings. Regardless of this hermeneutical ambiguity, what remains consistent is that Jesus is a central figure in God’s divine rescue plan for the world. I do not presume to capture every dimension of those doctrines but wish to highlight his central place within the Narrative. Certain theological assumptions will, of course, be evident.
city. That coming world is seen in the teachings and deeds of Christ and through exploring aspects of his ministry. Who we understand Jesus to be and what we understand him to be about reveals much about what that coming world, and therefore what the Church, will be like.

Who Jesus is can be seen through exploring some of the titles given to him throughout the New Testament. These titles convey the soteriological and eschatological identity and purpose of Christ as portrayed in the Gospels. The first title we shall explore is found in John 1:1-9. Here, John speaks of Jesus as ‘The Word’ (*logos*). John refers to him as such because as *logos* Jesus is the embodiment of God’s message to humanity. Throughout the New Testament, the writers build upon this notion and keep insisting that Jesus is the reminder of how things are to be at the deepest levels of existence.\(^{102}\) If this is the case, Jesus is our connection to *shalom*, the original word by which *shalom* was spoken into existence.\(^{103}\) This is an essential insight into the purpose of Christ. Throughout Jesus’ ministry, in the meals he shared, the teachings he gave and the healings he performed, God was, once again, speaking *shalom* into existence for all to not only to see but also experience. Wherever Jesus went, that coming world of God would be made known and established. Jesus is ‘the Word’ because he is God’s creative and incarnate communication to the world to return home and back to their identity and purpose.

The second title is one with which Jesus referred to himself: ‘the Way’ (John 14:6).

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\(^{102}\) Bell and Golden, *Jesus Wants to Save Christians*, 83.
\(^{103}\) Col 1:17; John 14:6.
Jesus is very clear that the future, the results of the thing that he is doing, will lead to everybody worshipping in some sort of city, and in some sort of temple that is simply bigger and wider and larger than the kinds of temples they were used to – some sort of temple that could hold the whole world.  

Jesus referring to himself as ‘the Way’ affirms this notion that somehow, in some way, he was the way out of exile towards that creational telos. In saying this,

Jesus was not making claims about one religion being better than all others religions. That completely misses the point, the depth and the truth. Rather, he was telling those who were following him that his way is the way to the depth of reality. This kind of life Jesus was living, perfectly and completely in connection and cooperation with God, is the best possible way for a person to live. It is how things are. Jesus exposes us to reality at its rawest. So the way of Jesus is not about religion; it is about reality.

This is consistent with the Christian Narrative. Since humanity had forgotten how to live out their creational identity and purpose the problem of sin is ultimately about how one lives. ‘The Way’ betrays the fact that the solution to sin is found not in offerings but in repentance, understood in its deepest sense as a complete turn-around (metanoia) of orientation and worldview. Because Jesus is ‘the Way’ he is meant to be followed, he is the means of remembering by virtue of seeing what it means to be human.

The third title, the ‘New’ or ‘Second Adam,’ is equally important and illustrative. This stems from the idea that it is through and from Christ that God’s new creation would be established. Throughout his ministry, by being ‘the Word’ and ‘Way,’ Jesus was re-inaugurating the beginning of creation and inviting the world to follow him and be part of that new creation, one that would be true to God’s creational intent. Thus, Paul calls Jesus the ‘New Adam.’ The first Adam failed to live into his creational intent and consequently humanity followed suit by moving in the same eastward fashion as the very first human.

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104 Bell and Golden, *Jesus Wants to Save Christians*, 80.
Jesus, as the ‘Second’ or ‘New Adam,’ would restart humanity and inaugurate a new
creation. Jesus is

not an Adam who would again give in to the temptation of the serpent but one
who would crush the serpent. But the serpent-crusher’s victory would have to
happen in a specific way. The only way it would actually change things would be
if the serpent crusher survived death – to experience the worst a human can suffer
and then come out the other side, alive.¹⁰⁶

Goldsworthy elaborates stating, “Adam was the first head of the human race but he failed
to keep his race in the right relationship with God. He was tempted and fell through
rebellion against his Creator. He was sent out of the garden resulting in all human
existence taking place outside Eden.” Thus, the Exile is due to sin. “Now the last Adam”
– Jesus – “emerges to be the head of a new human race. He fulfils Adam’s tasks
perfectly.”¹⁰⁷ This title for Christ reflects the idea that Jesus is the very means to
participating in the new creation, for he is the very means of its (new) beginning.

These three titles of Jesus reflect the Christian belief that Jesus is central to the
resolution of the conflict witnessed in the Christian Narrative. It is through him that the
restoration of the old creation and the beginning new creation will be completed, and
through him that humanity can find redemption and, once again, participate in God’s
coming world. The resurrection, to which we briefly now turn, validates these claims.
Whatever soteriological and eschatological significance we grant the resurrection, Jesus
was crucified because he embodied a worldview offensive to the powers-that-be and
called people to challenge those powers and participate in a new world by following him.
The ministry and message of Christ “was a challenge to those who held power in his
religious tradition and the threat of a new world order to the Roman Empire. Jesus

¹⁰⁶ Bell and Golden, Jesus Wants to Save Christians, 90.
¹⁰⁷ Goldsworthy, According to Plan, 204.
experienced suffering, rejection and execution, not because that was God’s will for him, but because a world of sin rejected his vision of the reign of God. The crucifixion represents what Wright calls an “ultimate miscarriage of justice” as it was the world rejecting, once again, the creational intent of God. Whether we take the resurrection literally or metaphorically (theological consequences aside), the general message remains the same. The resurrection is the vindication and validation of everything Jesus was and represented. That the ‘Word,’ ‘Way,’ and ‘New Adam’ rose from the dead was a definitive declaration that the present reality was not what God intended, that God is not finished with the world and that it is through Jesus that a new creation is beginning. Jesus Christ is central to the Christian Narrative because it is through him that God’s future is inaugurated and the grand vision for this world is radically displayed for creation to remember and follow. Through Jesus creation is reoriented to its original purpose and humanity is invited back on track until, at some point in some way, creation is decisively brought back to its creational telos as described in Revelation. It is through him that humanity can once again participate within God’s creation as they were intended: helping to create a world where shalom envelopes the earth, and love, justice, peace and harmony are found in all aspects of life. It is the world where humanity fulfils its identity and purpose in a worshipful life devoted to God’s creational intent. That is the end of the Christian Narrative.

While we do not know what that forth-coming heavenly state will be like or when it will happen, the Narrative leaves us with the hope and promise that it will happen. It is that hope and promise that calls us to anticipate its coming by participating in that world

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insofar as it is already here; this anticipation and participation is done by becoming a
disciple of Christ. Those who follow Jesus, called the Church, are those who become a
part of that coming new creation in the present. The Church are those who have found
their creational identity and purpose by giving themselves over to the Way, and who
participate in that coming world by living into their true identity and purpose. It is to this
Narrative that they turn to find their worldview and answers to the big questions; the
answers to those questions are found in the reasons and purposes of shalom.

It is this from this Narrative that the Church nourishes itself; not the fragmented
and consumeristic buffet of postmodernism. And it is this Narrative that is heard within
the Eucharist, liturgically and continually transforming the Church to be what Paul calls
the ‘New Humanity,’ a community who, through its very being, reveals the coming
Kingdom of God to the world around it. The Church, therefore, has an integral role
within this Narrative and the unfolding promises of the Creator. It is within that role that
the Church’s sacramental nature comes to light – a nature to which the Eucharist is
directed. With the source of the Church now understood, we now turn to ecclesiological
questions around the Church and its nature.
CHAPTER TWO:
PARTICIPATORY ECCLESIOLOGY

The Christian Narrative, as presented in Chapter 1, is essential to the Christian Church. It is through engagement with this narrative that the Church finds its identity and purpose, a worldview with which to find stability and coherence, and a framework with which to address all-encompassing existential questions. Through the Christian Narrative history is articulated through the lens of a Creator God who, in order to restore the world to its creational intent, came to earth in the person of Jesus Christ to inaugurate a new creation and (re)invite the world to participate in an eschatological reality. The Christian Church is composed of those who have found in Jesus Christ their creational identity and purpose and now participate in the coming of that future reality, the Kingdom of God. Church is thus fundamentally about participation.

Such a participatory ecclesiology rests on the principle that being Church is constituted through acts of kenosis and perichoresis, best illustrated in the Pauline concepts of Body of Christ and New Humanity. Participation is at the heart of these ecclesial concepts and it is from that participation that marks of the Church, those distinctive theological and social qualities the Church exhibits, are actualized. While important in their own right, these marks of the Church culminate to lead the Church into its highest nature and calling, sacramentality. This chapter argues that sacramentality is the crux of participatory ecclesiology. It is through its participation in bringing God’s future reality to the present that the Church expresses its sacramental nature, symbolizing how the world can experience the restoration that is taking place in and through Jesus Christ.
KENOSIS

The Church is constituted through *kenosis*. It is this initial act that draws a community together under the name of Jesus Christ. While I will employ *kenosis* ecclesiologically, it will be helpful to have an understanding of the traditional use of the term. Traditionally pertaining to Christology, specifically the incarnation, *kenosis* describes the act of God ‘emptying’ God’s self of divine nature by becoming human. Regardless of the specific scriptural interpretation of *kenosis* we use – be it ‘made worthless’ (Rom 4:14), ‘to be emptied of power’ (1 Cor 1:17), ‘to die’ (9:15) or ‘to be made nothing’ (Phil 2:7) – what is consistent in such Pauline passages is the implication that *kenosis* is fundamentally an act of wilful submission to something or someone else.

Charles Horne unpacks this concept through an exegesis of Philippians 2:5-8:

> The kenosis, being first represented negatively, with reference to a pre-existent state, as a free determination *not to hold fast* equality with God, is next represented positively, with reference to the historical existence, as consisting in the assumption of the form of a servant, and in being made in the likeness of men [sic].”¹¹⁰

McClain further elaborates:

> We may say, then, that the eternal Son, existing in the form of God—robed with the glory of Deity in its external manifestation, possessing and exercising all the incommunicable functions of the true God – counted not this being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but with loving condescension *emptied* Himself, taking servant-form; and as a result of this one act His whole earthly life became the life of a bond-servant, in which he does nothing, speaks nothing, knows

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¹¹⁰ “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross” (Phil 2:5-8); Charles Horne, “Let This Mind Be in You,” *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 3 (2) 1960: 39 (emphasis my own).
nothing by Himself, but all is under the power and direction of the Father through the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{111}

The definitions Horne and McClain offer emphasize how the Son, in a radical display of faithfulness and love, emptied himself of divine power and authority by becoming a human servant to the Father’s will – which I understand to be consistent with God’s creational intent and telos. Thus, \textit{kenosis} is an alignment of wills – the giving up on one’s own desires and worldview for the sake of another; it is the wilful giving up of a pre-existing state \textit{and} the submission into a state of servitude.\textsuperscript{112} Both stages of \textit{kenosis} are essential for understanding what is entailed in a kenotic act. It cannot be viewed as simply ‘self-emptying’ for that does not recognize the secondary ‘filling-up’ needed to complete the act; \textit{kenosis} must also include a realignment, for it is there that the beginnings of a new identity and purpose are found. We can now begin to see how \textit{kenosis} can be seen to parallel the act of faith and it is here that we can begin to employ \textit{kenosis} ecclesiologically.

Christian faith can be seen to be kenotic insofar as it is fundamentally an act of allegiance. Viewing Christian faith simply as rationalistic ‘belief’ is too reductionist and

\textsuperscript{111} Alva McClain, “The Doctrine of the Kenosis in Philippians 2:5-8,” \textit{Masters Seminary Journal} 9 (1) 1998: 92 (emphasis my own).

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid. This raises an important distinction between ‘alignment’ and ‘abandonment’ or ‘surrender.’ While there is, I am aware, an important difference between \textit{kenosis} in the Christological sense and the ecclesiological sense, I only agree with both Horne and McClain to an extent, believing they somewhat overstate what \textit{kenosis} entails. To align oneself does not necessitate a loss of free will, as to bring one’s will into sync with the Creator is a free choice, however painful and difficult. To ‘abandon’ or ‘surrender’ oneself can imply a loss of free will as one becomes at the mercy of the Creator. The example of Jesus Christ does not have to be read as emphatically submissive as Horne and McClain state; Christ’s kenotic act can be seen as a human demonstration of a complete and free alignment with God’s will. It is evident from the Gospel accounts of Jesus struggling in the garden that he retains the choice to drink from the cup. That story is one that holds great comfort and power for believers today who find their faith demanding and painful; it is just one of the many illustrations of what the Incarnation means - that because of Christ, God is able to look at us in those moments of doubt and say ‘Me too. I know how you feel.’
misses the deeper meaning and intent. Christian faith is an adherence to a ‘higher,’ in this case ‘divine,’ worldview and authority. Such faith necessitates kenosis. Using the soteriology and concept of faith found in the Gospel according to John, we are able to see this more clearly. Throughout the Gospel, the writer’s soteriological formula rests on the act of ‘faith’ or ‘belief.’ 113 What one notices about the Johannine concept of faith, however, is how the subject engages the object of faith – it is not a matter of ‘belief that’ but rather a matter of ‘belief in.’ The Johannine concept of faith is not about conceptual knowledge in the way one can believe that a mathematical or scientific equation equals this or that. Rather, Johannine faith is a matter of allegiance and commitment to an external and independent object. The object of that faith here is, of course, Jesus Christ. Christian faith is a matter of believing or having faith in Jesus Christ (John 1:12; 2:23).

The importance of distinction between ‘belief in’ and ‘belief that’ becomes clear as to believe ‘into’ implies a personal commitment lacking in the more formal ‘believe that.’ It takes the believer out of himself and makes him one with Christ. . . . Like James, the Evangelist urges a more vital relationship than mere acceptance of a doctrine about someone or something (James 2:18-26).114 As Bultmann explains, faith in an object necessitates an act of surrender. The act of coming to faith in Christ therefore involves the call to surrender or to empty oneself of one’s current understanding of identity, purpose and worldview, and realign those things with that of the identity, purpose and worldview of Christ.115 As Volf points out, ‘believing in the name of Christ’ is connected to submission, authority and lordship as to believe in his ‘name’ is to submit to and orient oneself around him. It is in this

114 Ibid.
submission or surrender that one finds a new identity and purpose.¹¹⁶ Faith, therefore, can be said to be a kenotic act. To have faith in Christ means that one “attests that [Christ] is the ‘determining ground’ of their lives; in him they have found freedom, orientation and power. . . . He is the source of their lives” because they have given themselves over to him through a kenotic act of faith.¹¹⁷ To have faith in Christ is to confess that in Jesus one finds their creational identity and purpose, that which was lost and forgotten due to exile but is now found through an alignment to the will and worldview of Christ.

The soteriological aspects of such a faith now come into play. It is in that kenotic act that one finds rescue, liberation, freedom and redemption from the sin-induced exile articulated in the Narrative. This is the kind of faith Paul claims we are justified by (Rom 5:1) and the same faith which, according to James, calls us into hopeful action (James 2:26).¹¹⁸ This kenotic faith is salvific because it leads to the resolution of the problem of sin and exile. A kenotic faith in Christ restores or turns one back (metanoia) to their creational identity and purpose. It is constitutive of ecclesiality because it leads to the formation of a community of those who have given themselves over to the Way of Jesus, a community Paul refers to as ‘the New Humanity.’ Understanding the New Humanity leads us from kenosis to the second fundamental aspect of the Church, perichoresis.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.
¹¹⁸ Because it is not conceptual but kenotic, it is active and embodied, which necessitates work. Paul and James are not in disagreement; faith is granted to us through kenosis but that faith, due to its kenotic nature, is active. “Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand” (Rom 5:1); “For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead” (James 2:26).
HUMANITY REBOOTED

The ‘New Humanity’ is one of the terms Paul uses to describe the Church. A wonderful and underused term, ‘New Humanity’ illustrates the result of the kenotic act and in doing so brings to light the participatory essence of the Church. In order to appreciate this, it is useful to return back to the Christian Narrative, for it is there that we see that this ‘New Humanity’ is nothing other than humanity ‘rebooted,’ begun again through Jesus Christ. The tension within the Narrative, as argued, originates in humanity’s participation in the disruption of *shalom*. The tension, in fact, has been so systemic within the human race that the writers of Genesis portray this participation beginning with the very first human, Adam. The sin of Adam, as the Narrative goes, begins that crescendo of sin thereby marking humanity with a propensity and penchant for disrupting *shalom*. It is this original humanity that is in exile, to whom the prophets beseeched to return to their creational identity and purpose and to whom Christ came to redeem, restore, or reboot, back into that same identity and purpose. This is essential for grasping Paul’s ecclesial label ‘the New Humanity.’

Through this ecclesial term Paul is juxtaposing the original humanity with the humanity redeemed and restored through Christ. Paul understands kenotic faith in Christ as essentially leading to the rebooting of humanity; through Christ humanity becomes a new creation, symbolically returning from exile. Christ, being the ‘new Adam’ (1 Cor 15:45) brings about that eschatological new creation (Rom 5:12-21) which is available to be experienced in the present through faith in him. Those who respond to God’s grace by aligning themselves to Christ and his Way partake in that new creation, therefore becoming part of it as the ‘New Humanity’ (Eph 2:14-16). Though his language may seem somewhat triumphalist, Gombis articulates this transformation well:
God in Christ has freed believers from their grip giving them life, raising them, and seating them with Christ in the heavenlies (Eph 2:5-6). . . . Humanity had been divided by the Law, and such divisions were exacerbated by the destructive work of the powers (Eph 2:11-12). But in his death, Christ has created the New Humanity made up of believers from any and every race and nation (Eph 2:13-16).  

This New Humanity is not a ‘new creation’ in the physical sense but ‘new’ in the restored sense; it is being transformed back into its creational identity and purpose through the work of the Holy Spirit. The New Humanity is the Church. The Church is the community, both locally and universally, who have experienced newness of life in Christ and act as the sign of the future culmination of God’s new creation in the present.

We can recall the characteristics of the humanity God intended to create in an effort to gain insight into the character of this New Humanity. If the marks of the Old Humanity are taken from Genesis 3 onwards, namely the disruption of shalom, the marks of the New Humanity are those seen in Genesis 1-2, Revelation 21-22 and most explicitly, as an embodiment of them, in the person of Jesus. The Church’s primary function, as Bosch points out, is to be this new creation arising out of the old.  

The Church is called to embrace the duties of rada and kabosh latent within the imago dei and once again participate in building God’s world of shalom. The Church is called, first and foremost, to be human and act as stewards of God’s creational intent. As Dillistone points out, “the Church is not an association of [humans] gathered together by the act of their own wills but is a creation of God in Jesus Christ, through which as His body Christ carries on His work.”  

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120 Bosch, Transforming Mission, 169.
live out that realigned life oriented around God’s vision. We thus arrive at the other aspect of ecclesial constitution – *perichoresis*.

**PERICHORESIS**

*Perichoresis* is the second key aspect for the constitution of the Church. Again, it is helpful to have a grasp of the traditional use of *perichoresis* before applying it ecclesiologically. Traditionally used to describe the nature of the immanent Trinity, *perichoresis* can be translated as ‘making room for another around oneself,’ or more poetically, ‘to dance with one another.’[122] The word is meant to portray the unique ‘three yet one’ relationship of the Trinity. *Perichoresis* is essentially about mutuality, common orientation and how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit participate in each other’s own being and roles within the economy of salvation and *missio dei*. [123] This communion “describes the intensely intimate presence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit with, to, and in one another, without their dissolution.”[124] *Perichoresis*, put generally, is a mutual sharing of purpose and the result of a deep alignment of two or more wills. *Perichoresis*, then, stems out of *kenosis* and is the dynamic of purpose for the New Humanity.

Ecclesiologically, it is the (re)joining of humanity, through Christ in the Spirit, with God in God’s redemptive work of creation. To illustrate this we look to the ecclesial term ‘Body of Christ.’

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[123] Ibid., 53.
BODY OF CHRIST

In order to understand how the church is perichoretic we turn to another ecclesial concept: ‘the Body of Christ.’ The ‘Body of Christ’ refers to the concept that the Church is, in some way, the physical body of the resurrected Christ within the world. Taken from Paul, the term conveys the result of those who have given themselves over to the Way of Jesus; if Christ is, as Volf phrased it, the determining ground of their lives, and confessing faith in the name of Christ is connected to submission and authority, the ‘Body of Christ’ conveys that the gathered are, in a sense, like Christ’s body, because Christ is their ‘head’ for they are conformed and therefore live according to his Way (Phil 2:5). That being the case, the Church is Christ’s continued presence in the world today.

The *haustafel* (‘head’) of Ephesians 2:13-16 functions to convey this common orientation and association in Christ which, as Gombis explains, juxtaposes the Body’s participation in shalom against the world’s disruption of it. The Body of Christ stands in contrast against the chaotic, destructive, and divisive social patterns created and fostered by the evil powers, who have perverted the created order in such a way that has affected every aspect and level of society. Those in positions of power manipulate, dominate, and exploit those who are weaker in order to increase in social status and honour. . . . The condition of the Old Humanity is a product and reflection of the character of the evil powers who left their appointed stewardship of creation and plunged the cosmos into disarray, disorder and chaos.  

Gombis asserts, rightly in my opinion, that because the Body of Christ is oriented in Christ and bears his presence through the Spirit, the community consequently displays the righteousness, fidelity, love and mutuality derived from the *haustafel*.

While Gombis is correct that these are derived from the headship of Christ, he fails to describe what the Body of Christ is ultimately about. The ‘Body of Christ,’ precisely because of

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126 Ibid., 330.
this association, is ultimately about how the Church is in a perichoretic relationship with the Godhead. If I am correct, and the Church may be called the ‘Body of Christ’ because it derives its identity and purpose from Christ, room is thus made within the missio dei for the Church to join the Trinity and participate in that grand vision of God on earth as Christ’s representative.\textsuperscript{127} This is the heart of ecclesial \textit{perichoresis}. Ecclesial \textit{perichoresis} expresses how the purpose of the Church is rooted in participating in the work of the Triune God because it possesses the Spirit of Christ.

It is this kind of participation that is implied in liturgical theologian Gordon Lathrop’s notion of ecclesiality.

Assembly, a gathering together of participating persons, constitutes the most basic symbol of Christian worship. . . . It is . . . a gathering together of persons in which each of those gathered has a participatory role, in which the central matters of worship are at the heart of this shared participation.\textsuperscript{128}

For Lathrop, gathering for the sake of participation is constitutive of ecclesiality. The Holy Spirit, as Lawler points out, actively draws this community together for that purpose.

The Spirit of God is always a creative Spirit. In the beginning, the Spirit moved over ‘\textit{tehom},’ the waters of chaos, to create the world and \textit{fadam}, man and woman in the world (Gen 1:2, 27). The Spirit moved over Mary to make Jesus her own son . . . and over Jesus to make him also the Son of God. The Spirit continues to create and recreate in our day, moving over the waters of baptism to fashion the church, the Body-Person of Christ, a ‘people made one with the unity if the

\textsuperscript{127} Another concept to frame this as is \textit{mimesis}. \textit{Mimesis} illustrates this participation by stating the Body of Christ is not mere mimicking of Christ, but identification with Christ. As Kendra Creasy Dean states, “Unlike its Latin counterpart \textit{imitatio}, which suggests simulation or copying, \textit{mimesis} means identifying with the original, and involves \textit{methexis}, or participation. In other words, Christians do not ‘ape’ Jesus’ life, death and resurrection; by God’s grace, we are incorporated into them. We become part of them, and in doing so they begin to define us” (Kendra Creasy-Dean, \textit{Practicing Passion: Youth and the Quest for a Passionate Church} (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 47). It is that definition and identification which evokes participation within the Triune God’s vision of \textit{shalom}.

Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God fires and enlivens [the] intricate, hand-in-hand dance that leads to intimate communion. The Spirit of God, in God, in Church, is a Spirit that constitutes communion through perichoresis.129

The Spirit is the catalyst of this ecclesiality as through the power of the Spirit the Church participates as Christ did in God’s vision for the world. David Crump would concur, though state it different theologically. He does not see the Spirit’s role as associating the Church with the Trinity’s work through faith in Christ. Rather, because he understands the Church literally to be Christ’s body, the Church participates in the Godhead, not through the Spirit, but as the third person of the Trinity.130 Crump argues that to read John with a Trinitarian hermeneutic is anachronistic. Once one removes that patristic lens it becomes possible to see how John describes perichoresis as between Father, Son and disciple.131 The Spirit of Christ is not a separate entity from the Son but rather Christ’s spirit which indwells in disciples giving them a place within the Godhead:

While the Father and Son embrace each other in perichoretic communion, the Spirit engages the world head-on and does not look back. Although [the Spirit] may not commune with Heaven, the Spirit does faithfully represent heaven’s interests. . . . The Father and Son perichoretically compose a divine bi-unity which perichoretically incorporates disciples within the Son through the Spirit.132

While Crump’s argument is controversial and I take issue with the deification of the Church through Christ, the perichoretic incorporation into the movement of the Godhead is noteworthy.

The Church, incorporated into the Trinitarian movement of redemption through the Spirit, is known by its participation in the agenda and vision of the Creator. This

129 Lawler, “Perichoresis,” 65.
131 Ibid., 398.
132 Ibid., 409-10.
participation is the natural and intended outcome of kenotic faith and therefore constitutive of ecclesiality, as from this participation the Church finds its purpose. The Church, because it is the New Humanity, is fundamentally about participating in that creational intent, a purpose found through giving oneself over to the Way of Jesus. It is from that participation that the marks of the Church arise. It is when the Church embraces its identity and purpose as the New Humanity that the marks of one, missional and holy emerge which, in turn, lead to the highest function of ecclesiality, sacramentality.

MARKS OF THE CHURCH

The marks of the Church arise out of that participation which, is itself, a result of kenotic faith. As Roger Haight states, “the church’s essential characteristics flow from its relation to God and the way in which that relationship takes shape.”

It is precisely because the Church becomes the New Humanity and Body of Christ, thereby participating in the stewardship of shalom, that certain marks begin to emerge. The marks of the Church are not strict conditions a community must have in order to be called a ‘church;’ they are not qualitative in that sense. Rather, these distinguishing characteristics speak of the theological and social nature of the Church. The marks are dialectical in that they are derived from the praxis of the faith of the gathered community. The marks function as goals, ideal claims about the nature of the gathered community that prompt the community to strive to actualize them to the best of their ability. Such marks point towards the faith claims of the Church and in an even broader sense, the

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story from which the Church confesses and in which it participates. Therefore, such marks are vital to the sacramentality of the Church.

The classical marks of the Church – ‘one, holy, catholic and apostolic’ – which first appeared in 381 CE in the Nicean-Constantinople Creed, bear much theological fruit but are not, by any means, canonical and have been interpreted differently throughout history.¹³⁶ Employing the generous orthodoxy postmodernism has brought to theological circles, I propose to appropriate the marks of the Church not only to address the contemporary context, and assert my own theological perspective but also, and perhaps most importantly, emphasize the fact that such marks are derived from praxis. Thus, I will frame and abbreviate the marks of the Church as ‘one, missional and holy.’

The reasons for such an interpretation need to be stated. Here, the classical marks of ‘one’ and ‘catholic’ are understood as ultimately having to do with the unity of the Church and are thereby encapsulated by ‘one.’ ‘Apostolic,’ while correctly emphasizing the importance of orthodoxy, has often traditionally emphasized juridical authority and is thus not a ‘mark’ in the same way as the others are; apostolicity “refers to the authenticity of the Church as measured by its continuity with the norms of faith as they were constituted in the original formation of the church in what is called the ‘apostolic period.’”¹³⁷ More precisely, referring to the Church as ‘apostolic’ means that the present Church is historically, theologically, and institutionally legitimated by its resemblance to the faith and witness of the apostles of the New Testament. My concern with this as a ‘mark’ stems from the fact that apostolicity has fallen into the habit of referring to the preservation of institutional Christianity as well as liturgical practices and theological

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¹³⁶ Lathrop, *Holy People*, 56.
presuppositions shaped by a culture long since passed and not always the actual story the apostles were witness to, the Narrative. The work of Dragas is indicative of such misplaced focus: “It is in the Fathers that we have the maintenance of the apostolic and prophetic heritage, as the Fathers maintain the integrity of the Church by keeping the orthodox faith and holy tradition of the Apostles and Prophets.”

We are, of course, deeply indebted to the work of the Patristic Fathers, and certainly the witness of the apostles; that is not in question. What is, rather, is how apostolicity places orthodoxy within their hands and not in the hands of Jesus Christ, the Spirit, and the Christian Narrative. We must engage that witness and subsequent theology of the Patristics with an open heart and mind to the prophetic and revelatory role of the Spirit.

To base our theology and praxis exclusively on the apostles and Patristic fathers works against the primacy of the whole Narrative, understandings of revelation, and pneumatology – which all work to guide the Church in engaging its culture and discovering new understandings of God and scripture (sometimes even at odds with ancient and traditional interpretations). For this reason I do not include apostolicity as a mark of the Church perse; it can too easily fall prey to idolatry and can place our contemporary praxis and understandings of what it means to be a fan and follower of Christ in an anachronistic setting, potentially inhibiting the Church from following the will of God today.

Thus, I choose to emphasize ‘missional’ as a mark of the Church recovering and reclaiming the

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139 This connects back to the prophetic nature of the Church to which I referred to earlier.

140 The United Church of Canada’s actions and advocacy on behalf of the homosexual community is an example of how an orthodoxy based on Christ and the Narrative, and not in the apostolic ‘tradition,’ allows the Church to speak God’s will in a culture radically different from that when the apostles first wrote. The Church looks to the principles found throughout the Scriptures and not only the practices, as those principles reveal far more about the will of God than practices which are so often engrained with cultural (i.e. human) baggage (see ft. 49).
original meaning of apostolicity as those who are ‘sent forth.’ This stresses the Church as
an active community with a specific purpose in the world. While the idea that the Church
is missional may seem obvious and is certainly a trendy topic in recent literature, it
cannot be understated.

ONE

The oneness or unity of the Church goes beyond a mere spatial or physical sense
and is expressive of the shared identity and purpose of the gathered community. The
ancient phrase ‘koinonia Spiritus Sanctus’ speaks of this shared orientation as the Spirit
actively draws the community together as a new creation through those acts of kenosis
and perichoresis. That ecclesia means ‘the gathered’ implies a shared intention and
purpose linked to the divinely aligned wills of the community. As Lathrop states, it is a
“gathering together to do those central things that identify them as Christian.”¹⁴¹ These
‘central things’ reveal how this unity is derived from the praxis of the Church living out
the theological claims they make as the New Humanity.

It is in the praxis of being the New Humanity that the community displays its true
communal nature and contrasts sharply with a society too often marked by lines of
division and inharmonious hierarchy. It is the presence of love, peace, hospitality,
mutuality, and solidarity amongst the members of the Church that enable it to become a
sign to the world of what true human relations and society are to be like.¹⁴² In other
words, it displays for the world to experience what community will be like when God’s
future becomes a reality for all. If this unity is due to praxis which, in turn, is based on

¹⁴¹ Lathrop, Holy People, 5.
¹⁴² Theodore Otto Wedel, “Evangelism’s Three-Fold Witness: Kerygma, Koinonia, Diakonia,”
The Ecumenical Review 11 (1957): 227. This is why understanding ‘Church’ as a place or
building is actually a serious problem within local congregations; it potentially obscures the
praxis-centred identity for the sake of mere physical space.
Christ, we can look to Christ’s own understanding of community to gain insight into what ecclesial unity looks like. Galatians 3:28 illustrates precisely this. Paul articulates that because the community is ‘in Christ’ (3:26) the people have gone through what Cousar describes as a ‘change of control.’ People have moved from a life under the law to a life ‘in’ or under Christ, a shift that entails radical this-worldly implications for what community looks like. As Galatians 3:28 explains, “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male or female; for you are all one in Jesus Christ.” We can, and should, interpret this to include generational, racial, economic, political, sexual and cultural distinctions. Such radical unity found in Christ stifles assumptions of a natural division, superiority or hierarchy within humanity. The oneness of the Church eclipses all these because its members mimic Jesus, the radical ‘boundary crosser,’ to use former United Church moderator Peter Short’s term. Through his breaking of taboos by intentionally crossing ethnic, gender, religious and social boundaries Jesus broke down walls of division and inequality thereby creating opportunity for reconciliation, relationship, and unity. The Church follows suit.

Nevertheless, the unity of the Church

is not one . . . in which ethnic, social, and sexual differences vanish, but one in which the barriers, the hostility, the chauvinism, and the sense of superiority and inferiority between respective categories are destroyed. Being in Christ does not do away with Jew or Greek, male or female, even slave or free, but it makes these differences before God irrelevant.

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144 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 155.
146 Cousar, *Galatians*, 86.
Thus, ecclesial unity stems from the mutuality and solidarity found in the love and radical acceptance of all people, and yet remains a celebration of the difference and diversity with which humanity is naturally endowed. Unity is not conformity, something with which many contemporary churches that target specific demographic groups need to be challenged. The prophetic declarations of Isaiah and Zechariah point to how a community shaped by Christ critiques such targeting. “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like an ox” (Isa 65:25) and “Jerusalem shall be inhabited like villages without walls . . . and I will be the glory within it” (Zech 2:4) both convey how the community of God is one without borders and open to all who wish to partake in it. Bell and Golden articulate well what happens in such a community:

People who had previously found themselves on opposite sides of a wall find out that the wall has been destroyed. People who previously had nothing in common discover that the only thing they now have in common is the one thing that matters. People who had fought over an endless array of issues realize that peace has been made and there is nothing less to fight about. In the new humanity, you hear perspectives you wouldn’t normally hear, you walk in someone else’s shoes, you find out that the judgements you had previously made about that group of people or that kind of men or that kind of women or all those kinds simply don’t hold up because now you’re getting to know one of ‘those’ and its changing everything. . . . In the new humanity our world gets bigger, our perspective goes from black and white to colour, our sensitivities are heightened, we’re rescued from the sameness and uniformity, because the wall has come down and peace has been made.147

The Church is called to be ‘one,’ to replicate the alternative reality of God’s future world which entails the practice of such an open and diverse community. It is within this community that the identity and purpose of being the New Humanity becomes clear: to show the world around it, one so prone to division and hierarchy, that there is another way to be human and be in community. As Foreman articulates in his song ‘New Way to be Human:’

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147 Bell and Golden, Jesus Wants to Save Christians, 155.
There’s a new way to be human
where divinity blends
with a new way to be human
where redemption begins.\footnote{148}

It is in embodying this nature that the Church ‘will shine like stars’ (Phil 2:13), revealing to the world the potential of humanity and what the world can be like under the vision of \textit{shalom.}\footnote{149} The oneness of the Church reveals the transformation that has taken place in and amongst those gathered together; it is a manifestation of the restoration found in Christ and a taste of what is to come in God’s kingdom.\footnote{150}

\textbf{MISSIONAL}

The second mark of the Christian Church is ‘missional.’ As the Latin root (\textit{missio}) implies, the Church’s purpose lies in its being ‘sent’ into the world.\footnote{151} This missional mark speaks to the active pursuit of that purpose found through ecclesial constitution. That purpose, as Bevans and Schroeder state, is an active faith, a life realigned to that of Christ whose aim is “to gather the whole creation under the Lordship of Christ Jesus in whom, by the power of the Holy Spirit, all are brought into communion with God.”\footnote{152}

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\begin{footnotes}{149} Phil 2:15
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\begin{footnotes}{151} The missional nature of terms such as ‘discipleship’ and ‘apostle’ is noteworthy.
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Mission is, as Wright puts it, ‘hope in practice;’ it is Christians, in the present, living out an active faith, adhering to the values and standards of God’s future kingdom.\(^{153}\)

It is appropriate to count ‘missional’ as a mark of the Church insofar as it describes the purpose of the Church and reasserts that ‘missional’ cannot be seen as an isolated niche ecclesial category but rather as innate and fundamental to its life and faith. Its purpose is not to simply exist or be a place of worship (i.e., just a building), but to be a people of worship whose actions are pleasing to God and synchronized with their creational tasks of stewarding creation towards a specific vision. That being the case, it is the mission of the Church to be prophetic in that wherever there is sin, there is the Church proclaiming, in word and action, \textit{shalom}. Be it in violence, injustice, unrighteousness, ecological devastation, apathy, spiritual impoverishment, despair, entitlement, hoarding, unfair domestic and foreign policies or broken systems of care and distribution, it is the mission of the Church to be God’s voice and challenge the social norms and practices in light of the teachings of Christ and the vision of the Kingdom. Wherever the anti-kingdom reigns, the Church will be also, subverting and redirecting the world westward out of exile into Eden.

Because the missional mark is so encompassing of the Church’s identity and purpose, even entailing and producing aspects of the other marks, it is necessary to spend some time exploring missional characteristics. For the sake of brevity, I will focus on only two: \textit{kerygma} (‘active proclamation’) and \textit{diakonia} (‘loving service’).\(^{154}\) Kerygma cannot be understood simply as verbal proclamation of the Gospel. The Gospel is incarnational and therefore, in order to be expressed, must be embodied – proclaimed in

\(^{153}\) Wright, \textit{Surprised by Hope}, 187.

words and action. Just as God’s Word became flesh, so too must our own; it is in the verbal and the active that the incarnate, living Word appears. As Kirk states, “there can be no authentic evangelism apart from a living testimony to the transforming power of the Gospel in action.” The words ‘evangelism’ or ‘proclamation’ can be challenging in our time, but we cannot dispense with them. We must reengage them to discern how Christian proclamation is a vital aspect of the purpose of the Church. One way to do so is to revisit the nature of how we share our story.

As it is the sharing of a very particular story, a story which defines our identity, the sharing must be done according to the principles the story maintains. Taking the methodology of the late Peter Gomes to heart, Bevans and Schroeder state that this sharing must be done with sensitivity, respect, humility, love and seriousness – all of which can effectively guard our proclamation from turning into conquest and conformity. Walter Brueggemann calls it the ‘Sabbath voice;’ a manner of proclamation which tells “the truth without pious protectiveness, without ideological reductionism” and is not dependent on “our conservative certitude or on our liberal self-assuredness, but only on the God who has given the Easter verdict over a new world and

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155 Kirk, What is Mission, 71.
156 Ibid., 57.
157 Peter Gomes, The Good Book Reading the Bible with Mind and Heart (New York: Harper Perennial), 1998. The late Peter Gomes offers a hermeneutical technique which allows us capture the over-arching themes of the biblical Narrative and not let the more challenging aspects of the story steer us towards a negative and divisive interpretation. We can use this technique with regards to our notion of proclamation. Gomes argues that we must let the over-arching principles the Narrative upholds to guide us through and critique the various practices found within the same Narrative. We should, for example, let the principles of love, grace, acceptance and community guide us through difficult passages dealing with gender roles (1 Tim 2:12) and homosexuality (Rom 1:26-28) both of which offer how to practice faith.
158 Bevans and Schroeder, “We Were Gentle Among You,” 3-4.
called it ‘very good.’”\(^{159}\) Our proclamation, whether from the pulpit, in political forum or on the street corner, must be done with a voice and manner shaped by the very story we confess and share. It is only then that the Good News can be shared with and experienced by the world. Unbalanced proclamation rids the Gospel message of its incarnational nature thereby offering little of the transformative, redemptive, nourishing, energizing and critiquing substance offered by a more consciously embodied proclamation.\(^{160}\) Our story must be told in a way which, in the very telling, offers love, grace, hope and redemption. This is one reason the Church needs to be encouraged to continue to proclaim its message, and always do so according to the principles of the Narrative itself.

_**Diakonia**_ is another aspect of the missional mark of the Church. As noted previously, the Gospel cannot be proclaimed in words alone but must be embodied in order to witness to the Gospel’s full transformative and incarnational nature. _**Diakonia**_ speaks specifically to those acts of loving service which, beside _kerygma_, make up that embodiment of the Gospel. Rudvin describes this ‘missional’ dimension as coming to fruition when the Church lives “out the gospel in selfless service and social action for

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\(^{159}\) Walter Brueggemann, _Mandate for Difference: An Invitation to the Contemporary Church_ (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 44.

\(^{160}\) Walter Brueggemann, _The Prophetic Imagination_ (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 3. This is an essential discussion when exploring the Church’s missional mark. Previous missional methodologies such as accommodation and indigenization have fallen prey to such oppressive and _shalom_ disrupting tendencies. This can be seen plainly in Barna Research Group’s findings over the past twenty-five years. Their research has shown that a weary suspicion of Christian intentions has grown due, in part, to the perceived disparity between professed and acted agendas with regards to evangelism (See: David Kinnaman and Greg Lyons, _Unchristian_ (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007). When the Church’s proclamation is without a Sabbath Voice, done without the principles found in our story, it puts our own agenda and needs ahead of God’s, which is idolatry. Our _kerygma_ must fall more in line with the missional modes of contextualization and inculcation which, while not perfect, utilizes the Sabbath Voice and frames evangelism in the context of the other. (See: Lamin Sanneh, _Whose Religion is Christianity?_).
others who are in need and trouble.”

Brueggemann speaks of it as “hope in action,” emphasizing that diakonia, and mission in general, is not rooted in and inspired by our own ideals and agendas, but rather the anticipation and hope for God’s kingdom inbreaking in this world. Not straying too far from this course, David Bosch emphasizes, precisely because of its relationship to the Kingdom, that this loving service cannot be separated from the pursuit of justice. However we wish to describe this more active part of the missional mark of the Church, what is clear is that it is about praxis, a communally active faith which embodies the Gospel message.

The missional mark of the Church has a powerful kenotic and stewardship component. There is a kenotic element in that the Church exists for the sake of something other than itself, namely the grand vision of shalom. This kenosis thus leads to stewardship. As Knitter points out,

> Jesus is the One who embodies openness to others. He is the One who empties himself on behalf of us. . . . As those who confess Jesus as the Christ, Christians are likewise called to open themselves to others.”

Claiborne and Haw concur, seeing service as an essential trait of Christ:

> The story of Jesus washing his disciples feet (John 13:1-11) points to how the primary tool of the kingdom of God is a towel.

The towel is a powerful image and liturgical symbol which functions by drawing people into the experience of the Kingdom of God. The selflessness and love incarnate in diakonia critiques and breaks down sinful systems and structures by offering a glimpse of

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163 Bosch, Transforming Mission, 72.
165 Claiborne and Haw, Jesus for President, 123.
the Kingdom through compassionate and grace-filled actions. The missionality of the Church comes to bear when the Church demonstrates praxis, or put another way, when it does the things the New Humanity is called to do – namely further the shalom within this world as creation awaits restoration. “It follows then that the Church’s mission must always and everywhere be to name and work against those forces that thwart and destroy life and to nurture those actions and institutions that support and honour life in all its forms. The Holy Spirit . . . is the power that raises the dead, the power of the new creation of all things.” Mission is about a ‘westwardly’ oriented life brought on by ecclesial perichoresis.

Rob Bell and Don Golden offer an illustration of this missionality through a reimagining of the Eucharist. Translating it as ‘eucharizomai’ (good gift), they argue that just as Jesus ultimately had his body broken and blood poured out for the sake of the world, the Church as well, embodying him through the Spirit, must offer its body to be broken and blood poured out for the sake of the world. As William Kervin points out, Jesus’ initial pedagogy for his disciples, as seen in Matthew 4:19, could be interpreted as teaching them to ‘fish for (the sake of) men.’ The interpretation dramatically shifts the missional focus from one of conversion to one built on sacrificial stewardship. Just as Jesus was the original ‘good gift’ to the world, the Church is to be “a living eucharist, . . .

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166 Ibid.
169 Bell and Golden, Jesus Wants to Save Christians, 150.
170 William Kervin. Lecture. Emmanuel College, Toronto School of Theology in the University of Toronto. April, 2011.
allowing her body to be broken and her blood poured out for the healing of the world.”

The missional mark of the Christian Church expresses this self-giving nature. The Church exists to serve the world in the same manner Christ did – by reordering the world through its embodied proclamation of the Kingdom.

**HOLY**

The third mark of the Church is ‘holy.’ By this I mean to refer to the ‘otherness’ of the Christian community. Literally meaning ‘set apart’ (from the Latin *sanctus*), ‘holy’ symbolizes the restored character or nature of the Church. As a distinguishing mark, holiness speaks to how the Church’s nature is ‘of God’ in that it is being restored back into the image and likeness with which humanity was created. The Church is ‘holy’ in that it is composed of the first citizens (Phil 3:20) of God’s coming world, holy people living amidst a world in exile.

The Judeo-Christian tradition proclaims God alone is holy and God’s holiness stems from how God is set apart from sin (Exodus 15:11ff). Humanity, because they are created in the image and likeness of God, are called to strive for holiness (Lev 19:2, 21:8). Sin, of course, counter-acts that pursuit. Sanctification, the name for the pursuit of holiness, begins with that kenotic shift to the Way of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 1:2). Through remembering how to ‘be other’ by participating in *shalom,* and living as the New Humanity the Church becomes juxtaposed and set apart from sin as it is, once again, aligned with *shalom.* As Bonhoeffer writes, the Church “is the fulfilment of God’s will to establish a holy community. Set apart from the world and sin to be God’s possession, the Body of Christ is God’s realm of holiness in the

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171 Ibid.
The Church is marked with holiness because it is the place where, in a world where sin is normative, a new reality can be experienced and seen in the life of those gathered together.

This understanding of ‘holiness’ needs to function as a check against theologies of holiness that are exclusively moralistic. A moralistic take on holiness – that the Church is holy because of a certain behaviour code – treads too closely to spiritual isolationism, a complete and intentional separation of the Church from everything considered sinful. Holiness rather, speaks to the nature of the Church as a community where the ‘otherness’ that is God can be found and God’s coming reality experienced. Understood this way, an openness to or engagement with the world is necessary. Moltmann emphasizes openness to the point of it being a mark itself, but I would argue the value of being ‘open’ to the world rests in what the world finds when it encounters the Church, not simply in the fact it is ‘open.’ The Church is holy because it is a community who embodies a world that is completely other, one set against the sinful nature of the world and one which offers a way of life that resonates deeply in the forgotten creational identity and purpose of humanity.

The gathered community through embodying the counter-cultural and alternative Way of Christ can pursue this holiness.

To be redeemed . . . is nothing less than to learn to place ourselves in God’s history, to be part of God’s people. . . . Redemption . . . is a change in which we accept the invitation to become part of God’s kingdom, a kingdom through which we acquire a character befitting one who has heard God’s call.

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Holiness refers to how the Church participates in and mediates God’s creational intent. Indeed, as Grdzelidze points out, holiness is essentially the product of mission, for it is the praxis of the Church. Bosch concurs, holiness naturally arises out of active faith. Because the Church gathers under the name of Christ and conforms to his message, the goal of the Church “is to be shaped into the entire form of the incarnate, the crucified and the risen one.” This means walking as Christ walked (1 John 2:6), acting as Christ acted (John 13:15), loving as Christ loved (Eph 5:2) and having the same mind as Christ had (Phil 2:5). The holiness of the Church comes from embodying the coming new creation Christ exemplifies. Holiness is found in being a “clear manifestation of people who have learned to be at peace with themselves, one another, the stranger, and of course, most of all God.” Holiness is a mark of the Church in that it demonstrates and symbolizes God’s transformative grace in the present and invites others to experience it themselves.

SACRAMENTALITY

The marks of the Christian Church are not simply a random collection of traits the Church just happens to exhibit. One, missional and holy are characteristics which point to the restored nature of this gathered community and therefore are seen in the life of each

175 Haight, Ecclesial Existence, 96.
177 Bosch, Transforming Mission, 168.
178 Bonhoeffer, Discipleship, 285.
179 Bosch, Transforming Mission, 168; Moltmann, Church in the Power of the Spirit, 339.
180 Hauerwas, The Peaceable Kingdom, 97.
181 ‘Sacrament’ and ‘sacramentality’ are not always synonymous in liturgical theology. The latter can refer to something that can exhibit traits of a sacrament but is not a sacrament itself. This is a distinction I do not tend to make here. As will be seen, my concept of sacrament is intended to be broad and not necessarily restricted to traditional sacraments such as the Eucharist per se. Thus, I will use ‘sacrament’ and ‘sacramentality’ to denote the same phenomenon.
congregation which is engaged through the power of the Spirit with the Narrative. The marks act as ‘signs’ or ‘symbols’ of the Kingdom of God in that they point beyond the congregation to that in which the congregation is participating. In this way, the primary calling of the Christian Church is revealed, namely to be a sacramental community. The Church is a community who through its very existence points beyond itself to the truth and transformative power of Christ and God’s coming Kingdom. To examine the sacramental nature of the Church I will draw upon the theology of Robert Jenson and Jürgen Moltmann.

JÜRGEN MOLTMANN

Jürgen Moltmann’s concept of sacramentality is rooted in his idea of history. For Moltmann, history is understood as eschatologically driven. Unlike Greek philosophy which sees history as having no determined end, Hebrew philosophy understands that the future is determined by the promises made by God, therefore being eschatologically directed. Using this premise, Moltmann sees history having a preconceived end which he understands to be the Kingdom of God, that creational telos described in Revelation 21-22. Sacramentality is properly placed within this context as, for Moltmann, sacraments are things which reveal God’s eschatological telos.

While Moltmann recognizes such traditional definitions of sacrament as ‘means of grace’ or ‘visible signs of invisible grace,’ he prefers a much wider definition, pointing out ‘sacrament’ comes from the Greek word mysterion (‘secret’ or ‘mystery’). Basing

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183 Jürgen Moltmann, “The End as Beginning,” Word and World 22 (3) 2002: 222; “The king said to Daniel, ‘Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery!’” (Dan 2:47).
much of his argument on Daniel 2:47, Moltmann argues ‘mysteries’ are a “concealed intimation of divinely ordained future events whose disclosure and interpretation is reserved for God alone . . . and for those inspired by His Spirit.” At its very essence, ‘sacrament’ is the name given to something, whatever it may be, which reveals and makes known truths about God’s creational intent and telos. Such an understanding of sacrament reveals why Moltmann, concurring with Barth, can state that Christ is the primal sacrament. Christ, being the Logos, is the embodiment of God’s creational intent and telos, thereby revealing those divine mysteries and truths to the world. Sacraments are symbols of that eschatological future found in the present. While the Eucharist and baptism are both examples of sacraments, Moltmann primarily uses the term to describe the nature of the Church as it, through the power of the Spirit, is sacramental in that it is ‘open’ to God’s future and the world.

The ‘openness’ of the Church is key to Moltmann’s understanding of the sacramentality of the Church, let alone sacraments in general. The ‘open’ nature of the Church conveys how the Church, because of ecclesial perichoresis, becomes realigned with God’s history and straddles the past, present and future. The Church thus reveals the redemptive history of God through its witness to the past Christ event and God’s future world. The Church is sacramental because, despite the fact it is still ‘creaturely’ in that it is sinful, it is still is able to communicate that future and divine mystery. For Moltmann, the nature of the Church is sacramental for it, enlivened by the Spirit, represents, however partially, the future reality of God made known in Christ. This nature arises when the Church

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185 Ibid., 197.
186 Ibid., 26.
stands for God to the world, and it stands for the world before God. It confronts the world in critical liberty and is bound to give it the authentic revelation of the new life. At the same time it stands before God in fellowship and solidarity with all men [sic] and is bound to send up to him out of the depths the common cry for life and liberty.\textsuperscript{187}

Being an ‘open’ Church means it reveals God’s mysteries to the world and for humanity; the Church achieves sacramentality when it prays and acts on the world’s behalf. For Moltmann there is no other calling for the Church to strive for; the Church “atrophies when it surrenders any one of these opennesses and closes itself up against God, men, or the future.”\textsuperscript{188} Thus, sacramentality is essential to ecclesiality. If the Church is not ‘open’ towards the future and does not let such openness define its existence, the Church ceases to be Church at all.

\textbf{ROBERT W. JENSON}

While Robert W. Jenson is by no means the antithesis to Moltmann, his work sheds light on another aspect of sacramentality which, in the long run, coincides with that of his German colleague. Jenson bases his sacramental theology on the Augustinian dictum that sacraments are “visible words” and turns to linguistics and the doctrine of revelation to frame his approach.\textsuperscript{189} A word, he states, is a communication which, although restrained by grammatical rules, can be used to convey multiple meanings as long as one is able to understand the language from which the word arose.\textsuperscript{190} Divine revelation, being a form of communication, follows the same rules. Divine revelation can only be ‘communication’ if it is in an understandable language. As Jenson argues, the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{187} Ibid., 1.
\item \textsuperscript{188} Ibid., 2.
\item \textsuperscript{189} Robert Jenson, \textit{Visible Words: The Interpretation and Practice of Christian Sacraments} (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1978), 3.
\item \textsuperscript{190} Robert Jenson and Carl E. Braaten, \textit{Christian Dogmatics} (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 301.
\end{itemize}
creaturely nature of humanity makes direct communication between God and humanity impossible as God is so completely other. God, therefore, needs to employ creaturely language to communicate with humanity. Jenson quotes Calvin: “thus the merciful God so tempers himself to our condition . . . that since we are caught in the flesh and so do not think spiritually . . . he leads us to himself . . . by fleshy elements, making what is spirit be seen in . . . flesh.”\(^\text{191}\) Calvin is, of course, referring to the Incarnation. God ‘tempered’ God’s self in the Son, who, by taking on flesh – i.e.: by becoming human – became the Logos, and thus being of divine and human nature could effectively communicate and reveal God to humanity.\(^\text{192}\) Jenson expresses this incarnate communication as an ‘embodied word;’ for that divine Word to be intelligible to humanity it had to be expressed externally through a human object.\(^\text{193}\) In other words, God’s revelation to humanity becomes intelligible when expressed in the person of Jesus Christ. To use the language of Augustine, that divine embodiment makes visible what was formerly unseen. It is this ‘becoming visible’ that is at the root of Jenson’s sacramental theology.

Jenson broadly defines sacrament as “a total action that speaks the gospel audibly and visibly.”\(^\text{194}\) Taking Christ as the primal example, sacrament is any human object that verbally and actively “communicates,” “mediates,” or “manifests” the Gospel.\(^\text{195}\) For Jenson, sacramentality accomplishes two things. First, sacraments are ‘signs’ of the Gospel. ‘Signs’ mean: “material objects regarded not for what they are in themselves but for their use to point to other realities.”\(^\text{196}\) This ‘other reality’ – what Augustine calls ‘res’

\(^\text{191}\) Ibid., 302.  
\(^\text{192}\) Ibid., 300.  
\(^\text{193}\) Ibid., 350.  
\(^\text{194}\) Ibid., 303.  
\(^\text{195}\) Ibid.  
\(^\text{196}\) Ibid., 300.
– is God and what God is doing in and through Christ. Sacraments, then, are human objects that point towards the Gospel message of the Kingdom of God. Second, sacraments are ‘events of grace:’ “they accomplish something, and that something is the new reality of which the Gospel speaks.”197 Putting it another way, during the experience of the sacrament one is able to experience, however partially, that future reality. Baptism, for example, is a sacrament because it symbolizes or points towards the new life found in Christ and entrance into the kind of community the New Humanity represents. It is an event of grace because through baptism one is able to experience what that restored humanity is like and find meaning, stability and coherence through participating in the Narrative. Sacraments in the theology of Robert Jenson are things that not only speak and make visible the Gospel but actualize it as well. They make visible the invisible reality of the Kingdom of God coming to earth through Christ.

By bringing these two theologians together one can see a kind of sacramental theology. Jürgen Moltmann, arguing out of an eschatological framework of history, stresses a broad sacramentality that arises when eschatological truths, namely the Gospel message, are conveyed in the here and now through Spirit-filled human actions. While Moltmann does stress the Church’s central liturgical practices, his theology does not remain focused on those rites. Rather, his sacramental theology eclipses them to encompass the entire Church. Robert Jenson, on the other hand, emphasizes how the practices of the church – which include but are not limited to baptism and the Eucharist – become ‘visible words’ which mediate and embody the Gospel message in intelligible ways. These practices build up the Church to be that ‘middle ground’ between the old and new creation.

197 Ibid., 305.
SACRAMENTALITY OF THE CHURCH

Moltmann and Jenson each offer valuable foundations with which to engage the concept of sacrament and how it relates to ecclesiology. I wish to build upon this foundation in order to address the Church in its contemporary context. Moltmann and Jenson were writing within their respective contexts and were both heavily influenced by their respective Protestant Reformed traditions. While their work is still applicable to our own context and tradition, as theologians we continue to be called by the Spirit to seek new understandings of faith in our current postmodern context. Therefore, I propose to take another look at sacrament using some of the gifts offered by postmodernism. Such gifts as Frei’s concept of generous orthodoxy permit us to broaden our understanding of sacrament beyond Reformed categories and integrate it with other perspectives and ideas. For this purpose the liturgical concept of anamnēsis is helpful.

If a sacrament is something ‘human’ or ‘creaturely’ which reveals the eschatologically redemptive telos of God and therefore makes visible to human comprehension the grace behind that redemption, the Church itself not only employs sacraments to enliven and strengthen itself but is sacramental itself. The Church is first and foremost sacramental because through the marks it exhibits, a corollary of that kenosis induced perichōresis, it recapitulates in its very being Christ and the New Humanity into which the Church is being transformed. As Malloy argues, anamnēsis, or ‘recapitulation’ as von Allmen uses it, is traditionally defined as ‘memorial’ or ‘remembrance.’ As Brevard Childs has shown, however, the English word ‘memorial,’ in the sense of a ‘calling to mind,’ does not convey the multivalence of the Hebrew zikkaron [from which the Greek anamnēsis is translated]. While zikkaron does include this ordinary intellectual process of bringing past facts into present awareness, it also can indicate a far more complex
process by which past events are not merely recalled but are understood to become active and effective in contemporary life.\textsuperscript{198}

Malloy argues that \textit{anamnesis} should not be exclusively tied to Eucharistic theology and liturgy, areas with which it is commonly associated. \textit{Anamnesis}, rather, should be applied to Christian worship in general. Worship is the remembrance-driven response to the Christ event and the grace and love of God displayed there.\textsuperscript{199} Worship, recalling Brueggemann, is about remembering for it sparks fidelity and gratitude.\textsuperscript{200} Worship functions as \textit{anamnesis} because it actualizes in the present the redemptive event in Christ thereby transforming the congregation into the people they confess to be.

By remembering, believers are transformed, effecting their own salvation but also becoming part of the salvific presence of Christ in the world. This dynamic is enacted in a circular pattern leading from ritual to life and back. The Church remembers what it has been given to embody, and thereby embodies it, only to be reminded in the very living out of this new life who it most deeply is.\textsuperscript{201}

Malloy brings us to an important question: what if ‘worship’ here can mean more than what takes place on Sunday mornings? What happens when we understand worship as that desired by God as seen in such passages as Amos 5:21-27.

\begin{verbatim}
I hate all your show and pretence  
The hypocrisy of your praise  
The hypocrisy of your festivals  
I hate all your show  
Away with your noisy worship
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{198} Patrick L. Malloy, “Christian Anamnesis and Popular Religion” \textit{Liturical Ministry} 7 (Summer) 1998: 121; von Allmen’s idea of recapitulation is the same as Malloy’s idea of \textit{anamensis}. As von Allen states: “It is this notion of recapitulation that worship in Christ does - Christ, in our worship, confirms or repeats or sums up the process of salvation history. . . . [Therefore] the cult sums up and confirms ever afresh the process of saving history which has reached its culminating point in the intervention of Christ in human history, and through this summing up and ever repeated confirmation Christ pursues his saving work by operation of the Holy Spirit.” Jean Jacques von Allmen, “The Cult as Recapitulation of the History of Salvation,” in \textit{Primary Sources of Liturgical Theology: A Reader}, edited by Dwight D. Vogel (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 129.

\textsuperscript{199} Malloy, “Christian Anamnesis and Popular Religion,” 124.

\textsuperscript{200} Brueggemann, \textit{Mandate to Difference}, 135 (see above p. 16).

\textsuperscript{201} Ibid., 128.
Away with your noisy hymns
I stomp on my ears when you’re singing ‘em
    I hate all your show

Instead let there be a flood of justice
An endless procession of righteous living, living
    Instead let there be a flood of justice
    Instead of a show

Your eyes are closed when you’re praying
    You sing right along with the band
You shine up your shoes for services
    There’s blood on your hands
You turned your back on the homeless
And the ones that don’t fit in your plan
    Quit playing religion games
    There’s blood on your hands

Instead let there be a flood of justice
An endless procession of righteous living, living
    Instead let there be a flood of justice
    Instead of a show
    I hate all your show

Prophet and poet Jon Foreman’s “Instead of a Show,” a targum of the passage from Amos, articulates the kind of worship God desires, worship which is not necessarily that which is typically seen and understood as ‘Christian worship.’ As Foreman points out, true Christian worship stems from remembering and being who God created us to be. True Christian worship is a life devoted to God by living lives oriented around the principles of shalom. Christian worship is anamnesis in that through our active remembering of what it means to be human, the world as it was intended to be by God can become recapitulated in the present. It is here that we can begin to link anamnesis with the concept of sacrament.

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202 Jon Foreman, “Instead of a Show” Jon Foreman, Limbs and Branches CD (Lowercase People, 2008), based on Amos 5.
If *anamnesis* is that which sums up the salvation history for the world to see, it brings to bear eschatological truths and makes visible God’s grace; if anamnetic worship is what the Church is called to do, then the Church itself is sacramental. The Church is sacramental because through its transformation into, and life as, the New Humanity the Church opens up God’s creational telos, displaying to the world the grace of Christ and inviting it to experience it itself. Participatory ecclesiology sees this participation as essential to the nature of the Church for it leads the Church to its highest calling of sacramentality. The Church is itself an embodied word, embodying Christ for the world to see, hear and experience.

This kind of sacramentality is not a natural or automatic occurrence. It emerges when the gathered community strives to fully follow Jesus and display their marks. The Church’s sacramentality, therefore, must be nurtured and fostered. One of the most significant ways to do this is through engagement with the Eucharist. It is in gathering around the table of Christ and in the breaking of the bread and pouring of the cup that the worshiping community can come to be liturgically transformed into the kind of people who are one, missional and holy.
CHAPTER THREE:  
THE EUCHARIST

The Eucharist is one of the central means the Christian Church has for maintaining and sustaining its ecclesial identity and purpose. As argued in Chapter One, the postmodern context in which the contemporary Church is situated has raised the need to ask about the sources from which the Church gains its worldview and sense of ecclesial identity. This thesis has argued that rather than claiming other narratives and worldviews as our own and using them to create a patchwork sense of stability and coherence, the Church would benefit most by revisiting its founding narrative. The primacy of the Narrative is emphasized in this thesis because it is in the Christian Narrative that we can find our ecclesial self and begin to remember who we are in Jesus Christ: the New Humanity. While there are various methods to lead the Church through such a transformation, preaching being an obvious example, there does remain one ecclesial practice that also stands out from among the rest. The Eucharist, when effectively administered and faithfully practiced, has the potential to liturgically transform our congregations into the people God calls us to be: people who are one, missional and holy, a sacramental community. The Eucharist can be seen an essential Christian practice for maintaining and sustaining a participatory ecclesiology.

While Eucharistic practices can differ greatly, and appropriately so, there are several aspects of the Eucharist that are instrumental in enabling such a transformation. It is through the gathering together to worship, the remembrance of Christ and the Christian Narrative, the invoking of the Holy Spirit, the partaking and sharing of the bread and cup, and the offering of ourselves to God in anticipation of that creational telos that the
Eucharist leads us into a fuller and actualized self-understanding. To gain a fuller understanding of the Eucharist and why these aspects are so vital, a review of its origins is helpful.

**THE ORIGINS OF THE EUCHARIST**

Understanding Eucharistic origins is not as simple as turning back to the biblical accounts of the meal Jesus had with his disciples in the Upper Room (as recorded in the Synoptic and Johannine Gospels and Pauline epistles). While those accounts are central, as the Last Supper historically constituted what became the liturgical practice of the Eucharist, to base the origin of the Eucharist in the Last Supper alone would diminish its breadth of meaning. To appreciate that breadth one must also take into account the table fellowship of Jesus throughout his earthly ministry. The theological thrust of the Eucharist draws from both the Last Supper and Jesus’ table fellowship. As Haight and others point out, the integration of these into a single ritual results in an elegant, profound and elaborate theological statement about who Jesus is and what he is doing:

The meals which Jesus is recorded as sharing during his earthly ministry proclaim and enact the kingdom. . . . In his last meal, the fellowship of the kingdom was connected with the imminence of Jesus’ suffering. After the resurrection, the Lord made his presence known to his disciples in the breaking of the bread. Thus the Eucharist continues these meals of Jesus during his earthly life and after his resurrection, always as a sign of the Kingdom.203

Foley posits “the whole of Jesus’ table ministry [is] foundational to our understanding of the Eucharist. While giving due attention to the importance of the Last Supper stories, biblical theologians such as Eugene LaVerdiere always situate these narratives in the wider meal context and recognize the summative nature of Jesus’ final meal before his

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death and resurrection.”

Similarly, Lathrop sees the Eucharist as a rite which revolves around the understanding that the meals Jesus shared were intimately associated with God’s eschatological promises. If we wish to understand what the Eucharist means, let alone how it is liturgically foundational to a participatory ecclesiology, we would do well to look at both the table fellowship of Jesus and the Last Supper. We therefore turn to biblical examples of both. The table fellowship of Jesus will be discussed using the story of Levi’s Party (Matt 9:10-17 / Mark 2:15-22 / Luke 5:29-39). The Last Supper will be discussed by using Paul’s letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 11:17-34) and the Synoptic accounts (Matt 26:17-30 / Mark 12:26 / Luke 22:7-38).

THE TABLE FELLOWSHIP OF JESUS

If the table fellowship of Jesus is as important to the development and understanding of the Eucharist, let alone to the entire ministry of Jesus, it is necessary to understand first century Mediterranean table culture. It is within that context that we can begin to grasp the bold and radical departure Jesus made from the norms and expectations of his day.

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206 Paul H. Jones would also add that the meaning of the Eucharist is diachronic, meaning that because it is a liturgical practice and developed over a period of time its meaning cannot be limited to the originating event. “Rather,” he writes, “meaning includes continuity with the founding event as well as the ongoing interpretation of the event as it endures through time” (Paul H. Jones, “The Meaning of the Eucharist: Its Origins in the New Testament Texts,” *Encounter* 54 (2) 1993, 169).
207 John’s Gospel will not be examined here to the same extent as the Synoptics as it offers a different, though not necessarily contradictory, account of what took place in the Upper Room. John’s account will be used to add weight to the theological claims regarding the Eucharist and its implication for the Church, though not in the exegesis component of this chapter, per se.
Paul R. Debenport relates first century table culture to a junior high cafeteria in the late 1960s.

A suburban Junior High cafeteria in 1968 was like a microcosm of the world. The goal was to protect yourself, and safety comes in groups. You have your cool kids. You have your smart kids. You have your greasers. And in those days, of course, you had your hippies. In effect, in Junior High School, ‘who you are’ is defined less by ‘who you are’ than by ‘who’s the person sitting next to you at lunch.’

Debenport’s point is that first century Mediterranean culture and society was one of a strict and entrenched socio-economic hierarchy. First century culture was not as dynamic and socially mobile as ours is today but, rather, static and socially fixed, where interaction between classes and social groups was kept to an absolute minimum. Such a hierarchical emphasis can be seen within that society’s meal culture. Debenport’s example is poignant. Meals “are [about] far more than simply enough food to get through the next hours. They symbolize and participate in social relationships, hierarchies, inclusion and exclusion, the boundaries around a group and the transaction across those boundaries.” In other words, one’s companions (literally, meaning ‘those who break bread together’) indicated who one was and what one was worth. As Bishop Willimon states, “our tables are our sanctuaries, holy intimate spaces of identity, where we learn ‘who we are’ and ‘who we are not.’” Not only was this the general cultural assumption but the religious norm.

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210 Ibid.
211 Lathrop, Holy People, 185.
213 Willimon, as quoted in Debenport, “Guess Who’s Invited to Dinner,” 53.
Due to the rise of the Pharisaic movement in first century Judaism with its emphasis on purity laws and righteousness, the socio-cultural sensitivities around community and meals became heightened.\textsuperscript{214} As Wright presents it, faced with social, political, and cultural ‘pollution’ at the level of national life as a whole, one natural reaction [of Judaic religious leaders] . . . was to concentrate on personal cleanness, to cleanse and purify an area over which one did have control as a compensation for the impossibility of cleansing or purifying an area – the outward and visible political one – over which one had none.\textsuperscript{215}

As Pharisaism gained more authority within first century Judaism, Jewish praxis adopted this focus resulting in the prioritization of covenantal obedience. This emphasis served to heighten pre-existing socio-economic and religious sensitivities, divisions and hierarchies.\textsuperscript{216} Even more than earlier periods of time, meals became representative of who society considered ‘in’ (the pure and righteous) and who was considered ‘out’ (the untouchable and sinful). Society, in other words, became fractured into various groups and communities based on their purity and covenantal obedience. A meal “implies an idea of communion and sharing: those who share the same meal constitute a body, and the fact of inviting someone to eat is perceived as an efficacious sign of integration and communion.”\textsuperscript{217} Sharing table meant people were at peace with one another and saw each other as equals.\textsuperscript{218}

\textsuperscript{214} NT Wright, \textit{The New Testament and the People of God}, 182. This is, of course, a generalization. See p.181-202 for an exhaustive exploration of the Pharisaic movement.

\textsuperscript{215} Ibid., 188.

\textsuperscript{216} Ibid., 189. “The Pharisaic agenda remained, at this point, what it had always been: to purify Israel by summoning her to return to her true ancestral traditions; to restore Israel to her independent theocratic status; and to be, as a pressure-group, in the vanguard of such movements by the study and practice of the Torah.”


law and boundaries – broke bread with someone the public considered ‘unclean,’
‘unrighteous,’ or a Gentile, it would be perceived that the pharisee or rabbi was
redefining the nature of covenantal community as his actions could be taken to mean that
God’s covenant was not just for Israel. This radically divided meal culture was the
context in which Jesus lived and the context for interpreting the meaning of his table
fellowship.

THE PARTY AT LEVI’S
(Matt 9:10-17 / Mark 2:15-22 / Luke 5:29-39)

We turn to this story because it is representative of Jesus’ table fellowship and reveals what Jesus was trying to accomplish through it.\(^{219}\)
Consistent throughout the gospel accounts of the call of Levi and central to the story at large is the fact that Levi was a tax collector. What is noteworthy is not that Jesus calls someone to discipleship. He was, after all, a rabbi and it was customary to call people to ‘follow’ him and become disciples. What is noteworthy is who Jesus calls to discipleship: Levi, a tax collector. As Witherington suggests, Levi would have staffed a booth of some sort in between Herod and Philip’s territories collecting Roman taxes from fishermen.\(^{220}\) Virtually all people in the Roman Empire viewed tax collectors with animosity and resentment. Tax collectors were notorious for gouging people for as much as possible in order to line their own pockets, as well as Rome’s. They were ostracized from most aspects of society, relegated

\(^{219}\) Depending on which Gospel you read the title character is either known as ‘Levi’ or ‘Matthew.’ For the purposes of this paper I shall call him Levi for no other reason than consistency.

\(^{220}\) Ben Witherington III, Matthew, Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon: Smyth and Helwys, 2006), 198. This fits with the chronology and geography of Jesus’ movements. Assuming Levi is the Matthew of the other gospels, one can imagine the dynamic of the tax collector’s entrance into the group of 12, a group composed of at least four over-taxed fishermen. The parallels for today are significant. How do we as congregations react as people who have wronged us, with whom we have moral or ethical disagreements, or who are simply ‘other,’ enter our communities?
to seek community within the lowest ranks of society.\textsuperscript{221} In a world where community allegiances were so vital, tax collectors would have been seen as ungodly to the Jews and as thieves and traitors to the rest.\textsuperscript{222}

Beyond the fact that Jesus would actually call a tax collector to be a disciple and the abundance of theological and pastoral insights we can draw from that, we consider also the banquet Levi hosted after accepting Jesus’ call (Luke 5:29ff). Osbourne points out that what the Gospels describe is a meal hosted by Levi to celebrate his new vocation and introduce Jesus to the motley crew of people we can assume kept company with someone of Levi’s profession.\textsuperscript{223} In attendance were people all three Gospel writers collectively refer to as ‘tax collectors and sinners.’ ‘Sinner’ refers to flagrant violators of the moral law including thieves, liars, prostitutes, and other unsavoury types – those not concerned with ritual purity or common human decency.”\textsuperscript{224} ‘Sinner’ was the blanket term given to those excluded from the synagogue for whatever violation. Given that the synagogue was the centre of a Jewish community, those labelled as such became outcasts, excluded from the general community and its meals.\textsuperscript{225}

The scene in this biblical story is quite explicit. Jesus, a rabbi, is sharing a meal (a sign of acceptance, solidarity, relationship, community and covenant) with the excluded, forgotten, isolated, and marginalized – the sinners. It unabashedly portrays Jesus intentionally interacting with sections of society that were, for all intents and purposes,

\textsuperscript{223} Osbourne, \textit{Matthew}, 336.
\textsuperscript{225} Ibid., 78.
suppressed, contained and dismissed from community, societal acceptance and human recognition. To everyone in that society the scene would have been profoundly shocking. This is precisely that to which the Pharisees were reacting.\textsuperscript{226} In bold fashion, the table fellowship of Jesus was turning the norms of religio-socio-economic structure on its head.

Moreover, Jesus was notorious for this type of behaviour. The story of Levi’s Party is, in fact, representative of the whole of the table fellowship of Jesus. As Foley’s list illustrates, the scope of Jesus’ table fellowship was not limited to just tax collectors and sinners.

He feasts with religious leaders (Luke 14:1-24), and old family friends (Luke 10:38-42). He dines with the rich (Luke 5:27-39) and in the homes of the poor (Mark 1:31). He shares intimate meals (Luke 10:38-42) and breaks bread with the multitude (Matt 14:13-21). There are women (John 4:4-42) and men (Luke 19:1-10); newly weds (John 2:1-10) and children (John 6:9); Jews (Luke 11:37-45), Gentiles (Mark 8:1-9) and Samaritans (John 4:4-42); the revered (Luke 7:36-50) and the reviled (Luke 19:1-10).\textsuperscript{227}

The radical aspect of Jesus’ table fellowship is not that he ate with tax collectors and sinners, it is that he ate with everyone and anyone. Mitchell describes Jesus’ fellowship as ‘random,’ acknowledging this radically inclusive nature. Taking into account the meaning of meals and the randomness of Jesus’ fellowship, Mitchell argues that

the table companionship practiced by Jesus thus recreated the world, redrew all society’s maps and flow charts. Instead of symbolizing rank and order, it blurred the distinctions between hosts and guests, need and plenty. Instead of reinforcing rules of etiquette, it subverted them, making the last first and the first last.\textsuperscript{228}

Since table and meal functioned to maintain societal boundaries and meaning, Jesus, through his table fellowship, was challenging societal norms by effectively erasing signs

\textsuperscript{226} Osbourne, \textit{Matthew}, 336.
\textsuperscript{227} Foley, “Which Jesus Table?” 44.
\textsuperscript{228} Nathan Mitchell, \textit{Eucharist as a Sacrament of Initiation} (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications 1994), 90.
of division and difference and recasting the table as a symbol of welcome and equality instead of exclusion and division. Remembering that these accounts must be read through a Christological lens of Jesus as Messiah, it becomes clear that what was being challenged was more than mere societal practices but also covenantal ideas that God’s eschatological world would have an ‘in’ and an ‘out’ crowd.

When the disciples are asked why Jesus eats with such company, Jesus himself responds to the Pharisees’ question: ‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor but those who are sick.’\(^{229}\) It is first important to note what Jesus is not saying: He is not saying ‘there is no such thing as unclean or unrighteous;’ he is not dismissing the concept of sin and brokenness, nor is he challenging the importance of covenantal obedience; he is therefore not challenging the perspective that these people are considered unclean and unrighteous. What he is saying is that he objects to how society engages and perceives them.\(^{230}\) Jesus is asserting a paradigm shift.

Jesus does not dispute the Pharisaic evaluation of his table company. But where the Pharisaic interest, because of its separatism, stopped short at assessment, Jesus’ concern moves on to treatment. To appreciate the behaviour of those under Jesus’ sway involves seeing sinners as needy and able to be helped, rather than contaminating and deserving to be spurned. There is a distinctly eschatological ring to the possibility Jesus holds out for the renovation of sinners.\(^{231}\)

This paradigm shift being offered by Jesus is eschatological and soteriological in that what he is doing is enacting what the messianic banquet and Kingdom of God will be like. As Wright states, Jesus’ constant feasting and weaving of stories in and around meals is a “symbolic evocation of the coming messianic banquet,” that eschatological feast which saw Israel and Yahweh coming together in a moment of covenantal and

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\(^{229}\) Matt 9:11-12; Mark 2:16-17; Luke 5:30-31.


\(^{231}\) Ibid.
creational renewal. This eschatological banquet not only spoke to the deeper meaning of Jesus’ table fellowship but also to his identity as the Messiah, “the one through whom the true Israel is being reconstituted.” In the act of breaking bread with both the ‘in’ and ‘out’ crowds Jesus was shattering first century understandings of society, covenant, and what kind of world the Messiah would establish by physically demonstrating it for all to see and experience. “In doing so [he] announced a new understanding of membership in God’s reign. Jesus welcomed sinners and ate with them as a portent that God’s reign is open to all.” The table fellowship of Jesus is thus a sound declaration that the eschatological promises of God are being fulfilled, albeit differently than anyone perhaps expected, and that God’s future world is not closed to a specific group but open to all. The table fellowship of Jesus, seen as symbolic of that messianic banquet (which itself is representative of the Kingdom of God), reveals that Jesus regarded no person as too lost to love or too low to serve and that all are welcome to partake in God’s covenant, regardless of stature, profession, reputation, history or religious habits.

There is an important clarification to be made here regarding what Jesus was stating through this fellowship. It is evident that Jesus is stating that God’s covenant is open to everyone who wishes to partake. In order to partake, however, something is required of the individual. As can be seen in Matt 9:11-12, Mark 2:16-17 and Luke 5:30-31, there appears to be a proper response to the open commensality of Christ, a response in which one repents of a sinful life, and finds redemption and a seat at that

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232 Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God, 532, 645.
233 Ibid., 532.
eschatological banquet. As the story of Levi’s calling and party illustrates, it is a freely given response of repentance and *kenosis*. The Gospels are consistent that Levi’s response to Jesus’ offer of discipleship was that of ‘getting up and following.’ Luke, interestingly, adds the phrase ‘and left everything’ (Luke 5:28). The addition is Luke’s attempt to reveal the radical nature of Levi’s response and what it means to follow Jesus.

As with any rabbi, the call to discipleship is a lifelong commitment, and in the case of Levi, it is a particularly life-changing decision. Unlike traditional disciples, Levi is much older, well established in his job as a tax-collector. His decision to follow Jesus arguably has much more at stake, as unlike the fishermen who could return to their boats, Levi could not return to his tax booth; getting up and following Jesus, as Luke asserts, meant leaving behind his identity and livelihood. Nolland takes it a step further, pointing out that “as an ideal response to Jesus, Levi’s action illustrates the nature of Jesus’ call to repentance.” As illustrated in Levi’s calling, the call to discipleship is a call to *metanoia*. The proper response to Christ is leaving behind one’s identity and purpose, one marked by participation in the disruption of *shalom*, and ‘turning around’ to follow Christ, basing one’s identity and purpose in him, the Way back to our creational intent.

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236 It is important to acknowledge that we simply do not know, nor are responsible for deciding, how God’s eschatological future will arrive and how we can come to be part of that future or, in other words, come to be “saved.” While I certainly see faith in Christ as the means to that future and redemption, I can only say at the end of the day that Christ is a means. That decision is simply not up to us as pastors, theologians and the Church, especially if we believe that God is bigger than anything we can possibly imagine. All this to say, despite the claims I may make or seem to make, I acknowledge the ambiguity and boldness of my soteriological and eschatological claims.


Levi’s call to repentance and discipleship illuminates the rest of the story and establishes what is expected of those with whom Jesus breaks bread. The proverb Jesus shares about being a physician reveals how this is the case. “In a Jewish context, the proverb would suggest that just as the physician communicates healing to the sick rather than the sick infecting him with their sickness, so Jesus communicates his own holiness to others, making them clean, rather than becoming unclean by his contact with them.”

Keeping the proper response of repentance in mind, which again implies the existence of a righteous state, the treatment Jesus puts forth is himself. The table practice of Christ is therefore one of redemption. “I have come to call not the righteous but the sinners,” with Luke adding the implied ‘to repentance’ (v.32), reveals that the mission of Christ is to bring those in sin-induced exile back to their creational identity and purpose through repentance. To become ‘healthy,’ therefore, is to respond to Jesus by giving up and repenting of one’s participation in sin and turning around (metanoia) to follow the Way of Jesus. Redemption is not conferred by mere proximity to Jesus but by freely responding to the grace and love of God he embodies through kenotic faith. It is the intended response not only from those whom society deems ‘sinful’ but from all, as evidenced by the randomness of his table fellowship.

The table fellowship of Jesus, therefore, is eschatological and soteriological. Through these meals Jesus, as host and messiah, enacts a new vision of the messianic banquet and invites those who experience the hope and grace within to freely respond by following his Way, thereby experiencing that eschatological new life. “Jesus’ meal practice and his use of food imagery was [part of] his teaching about the gracious

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240 Boring, Mark, 82.
inclusivity of God’s invitation to enter the kingdom, about how those invited are to live in God’s reign.”

Rouillard elaborates:

Jesus transforms the meaning of the occasion. Instead of being received [by Levi as host], it is he who receives these publicans, sinners and sick people he has come to seek; all of these people . . . more or less excommunicated from society are welcomed and admitted by him to the community, or communion, of his disciples. . . . the meal in which he takes part is transformed, thanks to him, into a locus of healing and welcome.

The meals of Jesus do not simply convey this new vision of how inclusive the eschatological reality will be. They also reveal the soteriological amendment Jesus is making on the old covenant. By responding to God’s grace and love through kenotic faith in Christ, thereby receiving Jesus’ holiness and becoming ‘healthy,’ one comes to partake in that redemptive reality, not only in the future but presently as well.

OTHER EXAMPLES OF TABLE FELLOWSHIP

Other examples of table fellowship are indicative of this eschatological and soteriological symbolism. Jesus’ encounter with Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:36-50) reveals how Christ’s table fellowship “removed the masks” people wear thus exposing each person to one another’s humanity and shared need for love, acceptance and grace.

Such a revelation prompts one to break away from divisive hierarchies and come together forming new communities oriented around love, solidarity and mutuality.

The Feeding of the Five Thousand illustrates the radical openness of Jesus’ table and his messianic identity. Taking into account the Old Testament parallels, the Feeding of the Five Thousand can be seen to further the idea that through the meals he

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242 Rouillard, “From Human Meal to Christian Eucharist,” 142.
243 Ibid.
shared Jesus was symbolizing that through him an eschatological community is gathered together out of exile.\textsuperscript{245} As meals “symbolized friendship, intimacy, and unity, [involved] reconciliation and making a person part of one’s extended family, i.e.: social, religious and economic equals, Jesus is inviting them to become part of his new family of kingdom people and promising those who respond that he will provide for their needs” – as symbolized in the crowd’s satisfaction (Matt 14:20) after eating and the surplus of food left over.\textsuperscript{246} The sheer size of the crowd is a stark indication about the diversity and inclusivity of the alternative kind of community Jesus was creating.

Through these examples of Jesus’ table fellowship it becomes clear that the authors of the New Testament saw something much greater than Jesus merely eating. Through the lens of their faith and culture they saw a bold declaration that things are not as they should be and that Jesus, the Messiah, is changing the world back to its creational intent. Through his meal fellowship he was inviting the world to respond to this eschatological declaration of restoration by following him. The theological declaration is that the eschatological banquet is open to all because Christ is open to all; he invites all people for, as the Narrative states, all have wandered away (Isa 53:6) from their creational identity and purpose. There are no expectations put on experiencing the fellowship of Christ other than that of positively responding to his invitation to follow, repent, and experience life as it was meant to be. It was this understanding of table fellowship, including its responsive aspect, that informed the development of the Eucharist.

\textsuperscript{245} Ex 12, Num 27:17, 1 Kings 22:17 and 2 Chron 18:16; Boring, \textit{Mark}, 183; Osbourne, \textit{Matthew}, 569.

THE LAST SUPPER
(1 Cor 11:17-34; Matt 26:17-30; Mark 12:26; Luke 22:7-38)

While the table fellowship of Jesus is an important source of Eucharistic thought and development, equally important is the template from which the Eucharist is traditionally framed, the Last Supper. Tradition holds that the Eucharist as a liturgical ritual was historically instituted on the night when Jesus was betrayed (1 Cor 11:23). By looking first at the Synoptic accounts of the Last Supper and then at the Pauline description in 1 Corinthians, we are able to see how the Supper was a reinterpreted Passover meal symbolizing the convening of a new covenant between God and those who had responded to Jesus Christ; a meal seen to provide for them the nourishment and memory needed to participate in the Triune God’s redemptive work.

SYNOPTIC ACCOUNTS

Although they were written after Paul’s epistles to the Corinthians, the Synoptic accounts provide the context in which the Last Supper took place, namely the Passion and Passover. The Synoptics are consistent in placing the Last Supper on the eve of the Passover (Matthew 26:17; Mark 14:12; Luke 22:7). Thus, Witherington argues that Jesus recast the Passover meal, effectively creating a new, albeit related, meal by reframing themes of covenant and eschatological promise around himself. Understanding the covenantal and eschatological themes of the Passover allows us to see more clearly what Jesus was actually doing through the Last Supper thereby allowing us to see how it informs the Eucharist.

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248 Witherington, Matthew, 483.
The Passover meal is a Jewish memorial meal centred on the promises God made to Israel during the exodus of Israel out of Egypt; it is a celebration of Israel’s covenantal relationship with the Creator God, their identifying characteristic.

Ancient Israel saw God’s initiating love for a powerless people oppressed by Pharaoh as comparable . . . to the graciousness of an earthly ruler who out of love for the citizenry established a bond and commitment between monarch and people. . . . Entrance into the covenant is not merited, but our acceptance of inclusion into the covenant implies constancy and righteous obedience."249

It is this covenantal relationship between Israel and God that frames Judaic praxis (it was this covenant the Pharisees of Jesus’ time sought to honour through their purity laws).

The Passover is the ritualized recapitulation of that covenantal relationship and its historic demonstration in the Exodus story.

Unleavened bread was eaten as a reminder of the gracious God who snatched the people out of Egypt with such a dispatch that there was not time for yeast to cause the dough to rise. . . . And the Passover lamb was a reminder of the original animal’s slaughter so that their blood, applied to the doorposts of the Hebrew homes, would ensure that the angel of death would harmlessly pass-over the firstborn of Israel.250

The celebration of the Passover was thus threefold: it was a reminder that Israel’s identity was rooted in that covenantal relationship with God; it was a reminder that God rescues the afflicted; it was a reminder that the proper response to such grace is obedience to God’s creational intent.251 The recapitulation of the Passover event was central to the Passover meal for in that historic event Israel finds their identity and purpose; it was there that God created a covenant full of eschatological promise and hope, thereby calling Israel to align themselves with God and shalom.

250 Ibid., 19.
251 See the discussion on ‘worship’ in chapter one and two, specifically regarding Brueggemann’s concept.
It is within the celebration of the Passover that the Synoptics place the Last Supper. While information does not exist about how the meal unfolded in its entirety, the Synoptics are clear that during that meal

Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take and eat; this is my body.’ Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.’

To understand these words we must keep in mind the eschatological and covenantal thrust of what Jesus is saying. The function of the ‘words of institution,’ as we will see, was to link those who celebrated the meal with the redemptive death of Jesus, which Jesus saw as immanent. “From the perspective of the eucharistic words, to share in the bread and cup meant to share in the redemptive power of his death” and participate in the new covenant established by him. Therefore, we turn to see how Jesus read his life and death, and their eschatological and soteriological meanings, into these words of institution.

The bread, blessed, broken and shared, is emphatically linked to Jesus through his words ‘this is my body given for you.’ As we have seen, in Judaic culture the sharing of bread was already deeply symbolic of fellowship. Here Jesus takes this concept further by linking the bread to his physical being. The gesture implied by eating the bread expresses an even deeper sense of fellowship established in the rite; it was one of kenosis and perichoresis, of becoming one with what you eat. By eating the ‘body of Christ’ one

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252 Matt 16:26-29
253 It is important to keep in mind when we read the Gospel accounts that they were written in light of the death and resurrection of Christ.
shares in the very identity and being of Christ. By sharing in the identity and being of Christ a vicarious connection is forged, meaning not only do those who eat Christ’s body share in his identity and being but also that those who share in his body share in Christ’s death and resurrection. The soteriology of the Lord’s Supper now becomes clear. The bread is a symbol and articulation of the incorporation into Christ ensuing from that redemptive kenotic faith made by those who had experienced Jesus most intimately; eating the bread, therefore, was symbolic of the disciples’ alignment with Christ and of their communal orientation around him. The bread is also symbolic of the divine nourishment and satisfaction Christ is portrayed to be. This is most clearly expressed in John’s imagery of ‘bread of life’ (6:35). Christ is the means of sustenance for that new life, the very means by which one continues to partake in that new life. Through eating the ‘body of Christ’ the disciples symbolized their faith in and fellowship with Jesus and found strength to continue in the Way.

The wine is a far more prominent feature in most scholarship, perhaps due to the wine’s summative nature. While the bread symbolizes the soteriological aspect of aligning oneself to Jesus, the cup of wine furthers its meaning by symbolizing the eschatological significance of who Jesus is and what Jesus was doing. While admittedly off-putting to many past and current sensibilities, blood is intimately tied to Judaic concepts of covenant and Passover. Blood is the means of sealing a covenant (Ex 24:1-11) and was, during the flight out of Egypt, a sign of divine protection (Ex 12:1-14). The disciples would have been all too aware of these parallels when Jesus offered them the

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cup of wine stating ‘this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.’

Perhaps even more shocking than being asked to drink blood was Jesus’ own assertion that the sacrifice of his blood would establish a new covenant. This new covenant, according to Luke in particular, is the one foreshadowed in Jer. 31:31-34.259 “Jesus’ death is understood . . . as the means through which the fulfilment of the eschatological prophecy of Jeremiah has taken place.”260 Therefore, through Jesus’ death, which the Last Supper anticipates, “God’s future reign has become a present reality through the death of God’s servant Jesus. Even now those who share in the eucharistic cup, share in the blessings of the future reign of God.”261 The cup of the covenant therefore establishes Jesus as the means to that eschatological future where Israel, and now all of creation, may be redeemed and brought before God.262 This expansion of the covenant is reinforced in the table fellowship of Jesus. The words of Jesus at the Last Supper around the cup “signify that those who share in the eucharistic . . . cup . . . share in the redemptive power of Jesus’ death by which the beginning of the final salvation is ushered in.”263 Taking a drink of the blood of Christ is not meant to be taken literally, but as an acceptance of the new covenant which Jesus offers through himself. Put another

259 “The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, ‘Know the Lord’, for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more” (Jer. 31:31-34).
260 Crockett, Eucharist, 19.
261 Ibid.
263 Crockett, Eucharist, 16.
way, the drinking from the cup is similar to the bread in that it is a declaration of faith in Christ, that one wishes to partake in the world he is creating.

The Last Supper according to the Synoptics is one quite different from the other meals throughout his ministry. It is one that enacts the proper response to Jesus’ invitation of God’s grace. The Last Supper is a meal of call and response. While the table fellowship of Jesus demonstrates what God’s reign will be like, the Last Supper demonstrates that one enters that reign through a response of giving themselves over to Christ. It is a meal that acknowledges that he is the means not only of how that eschatological reality begins but of how one participates in it. “The eucharistic bread and wine bring to those to partake of them, not an idea of an instruction,” as perhaps the table fellowship can be seen as, “but a most concrete reality.” The Last Supper was a means to bring Jesus’ disciples, men who had given themselves over to Jesus’ Way, into the economy of salvation. The Last Supper was a meal that enacted the receiving of a covenant.

PAULINE EPISTLES

The Pauline tradition brings an even greater depth to the Synoptic account of the Last Supper. While 1 Corinthians was written prior to the Gospels, it provides insight into how the Last Supper was becoming theologically and liturgically interpreted by the early Church. Paul’s mention that he had ‘received from the Lord’ (1 Cor. 11:23) this Eucharistic understanding most likely implies that Paul is passing on an established liturgical tradition which is historically rooted in the Last Supper, and therefore indirectly

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265 Ibid., 422.
‘from the Lord.’ Like the authors of the Synoptics, Paul understands the Lord’s Supper as distinct from Jesus’ table fellowship in that the Lord’s Supper is a meal intended specifically for the disciples and therefore the Church’s self understanding.

The context of 1 Corinthians 11:23-34 is a community who in its physical being and its communal worship practices experiences division and exclusion. Paul identifies the source of the tension within the community as stemming from faulty praxis around the Lord’s Supper. As Murphy-O’Connor writes, the community “faltered in the process of translating those words [of Christ at the original Eucharist with regards to unity and being his body] into a pattern of practical living,” thus resulting in division and exclusion. Paul’s objection to their manner of meal practice, evidenced by his calling it ‘pagan’ (1 Cor 10:14-22) and ‘not the Lord’s Supper’ (1 Cor 11:20), arises due to his emphasis on the importance of the unity of the Church. As numerous Pauline passages such a Gal 3:26-28 and Col 3:10-11 reveal, Paul’s fundamental ecclesial and anthropological assertion is that

the unity of the Church is that of a living person. No one possesses but each one participates in a shared life. . . . The idea of an autonomous Christian is a contradiction in terms. Believers are what they are because they belong to something greater than themselves. . . . The vitality of this relationship [to Christ as the head] is constitutive of their new mode of being. We think of individuals coming together to create a community. For Paul it is precisely the reverse. The community is a radically new reality . . . which makes the believer a new creation (2 Cor 5:17).

Anything that works against this unity works against the nature of the community and therefore threatens the community’s identity as the new creation, Christ’s body, and thus

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267 Ibid.
269 Ibid., 5.
its eschatological and sacramental purpose. According to Pauline theology, for a community to call themselves ‘church’ and to believe that Jesus is the Christ (i.e., having gone through the kenotic and perichoretic process of faith) necessitates a unity (or at least the pursuit of a unity) achieved through embodying the values and ethic of that new creation. What Paul hears regarding the Corinthian community contradicts this ecclesial premise, hence his rebuke and challenge. In response, Paul pedagogically puts forth the proper praxis of the Eucharist as a solution. This meal Jesus shared with his disciples is the best thing Paul can point toward to ameliorate the Corinthian dilemma; he understands the intent of the Eucharist to be one of ecclesial transformation and praxis.

Paul’s understanding of the Lord’s Supper, again rooted in the liturgical tradition developed by the latter part of the first century, is similar to that of Luke in that through it Jesus articulated the beginning of a new covenant through the words spoken over the bread and the wine during the Last Supper. For Paul, the bread symbolizes not only Christ’s sacrificial death but also, and more to his point, the affirmation of a redemptive unity and fellowship within Christ.

For all to eat a common loaf is already a sharing, but because of the particular nature of this loaf Christ is directly involved. The participants share with each other but also ‘participate in Christ.’ Just as bread sustains physical existence, they draw from the source of their common life (Col 2:19). In the action of partaking they commit themselves anew in faith and love not only to Christ but to each other. The bread offered to the disciples was symbolic of the redemptive nature of the community Jesus was creating in himself, a community that would, through his death and resurrection, be a new creation. This new creation is identified through its oneness as it shares a common life in Christ and in each other. The bread is intimately associated with

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270 Ibid., 17.
271 Ibid., 24.
the cup as it affirms that desire to be one with Christ and take up the covenantal and communal obligations of being part of that new creation.

With regard to the cup, Paul maintains the link between it and the establishment of a new covenant (v.25). As Judaic tradition necessitated that a covenant be sealed with sacrifice of blood (Ex 24:8), Paul saw Jesus’ words ‘this cup is the new covenant in my blood’ (v. 25) to indicate that Jesus understood himself to be creating a new covenant between humanity and the Creator. To partake in this covenant means one must be willing to partake in the blood. In other words, through the cup Jesus was symbolically enacting and affirming the kenotic act of faith the disciples had made. In accepting the cup the disciples affirm their faith and acceptance of the new covenant thereby reassuring themselves and each other not only of their place in that eschatological reality, but their participation within its arrival as well. It is at once an act of commitment and renewal. For Paul, the Eucharist is where the future meets the present and one confesses their continued desire to participate in that coming reality. Therefore, for Paul, “the shared bread and cup are participation in the body and blood of Christ.” It was Jesus’ symbolic rite of reminding his disciples of who they are, what following him entails and providing the nourishment to do so. It is a means of placing disciples within the Narrative, of what Jesus was about - restoring the world back to its creational intent and creating a sacramental community that would partake in that eschatological reality in the present.

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272 Ibid., 18.
273 Stookey, Eucharist, 31; Crockett, Eucharist, 19.
274 Lathrop, Holy People, 192.
THE EUCHARIST

In light of the above, the Eucharist can be seen as a liturgical rite that was developed by the Early Church through deep reflection on both the table fellowship of Jesus and the Lord’s Supper. Jesus’ table fellowship and the Lord’s Supper represent two foundational eschatological Christological claims. First, the table fellowship reveals Jesus’ eschatological significance. Through its radically inclusive and random nature, and its overall parallel with the messianic banquet, the Early Church recognized that these meals were symbolic of a dramatic eschatological reordering of society where community is no longer based on socio-economic status but on shared humanity.275 Second, the Lord’s Supper, always seen in light of Jesus’ death and resurrection, added a soteriological dimension to this burgeoning Christology by illustrating how one partakes in that eschatological future. That future, formerly open only to Israel, is now for all to partake. That openness, however, is realized through positively responding to Christ’s invitation through repentance and kenotic faith. Taking these claims into account, the Lord’s Supper was the affirmation of one’s entry into the economy of salvation. The Supper was therefore a means, instituted by Jesus, to strengthen, nourish and orient those who had made that kenotic shift to move further into perichoretic relationship with the Triune God.

A question remains: how does the Eucharist function as a synthesis of these two aspects of Jesus’ ministry?276 The Eucharist developed as a liturgical practice because it the Church saw itself. In the continuation of breaking bread and pouring wine the

275 Perhaps it is even better to expand this and say ‘creation’ thereby including within our community a recognition of our environment and all God’s ‘good’ creation.
276 For an understanding of the historical development of the Eucharist see Stookey, The Eucharist.
Church saw a way of grounding, nourishing, affirming and edifying their characteristic marks so they could be a people who are, in their very corporate identity, Christ’s ‘open table,’ where God’s future meets the present for all to experience. In other words, the Eucharist is about ‘becoming’ the Church. The Eucharist was developed to be a liturgical means which

renews the remembrance of Christ and awakens hope for his kingdom. In this way it sets every day life in the great arc spanning this remembrance and hope. In the history of Christ, the assembled community perceives the trinitarian history of God, his love’s openness to the world and the perfection of all things in his joy. The liberation it experiences in the present moment seeks harmony with the joy of all creation in being, and lays anticipatory hold on the joy of redeemed existence. The [Eucharist] sets the assembled community . . . in the broad context of the trinitarian history of God with the world . . . In this it acquires and demonstrates freedom – freedom from the alienation of existence, freedom for the alternative of new life, and freedom for the acceptance of existence in the present.

The Eucharist is fundamentally about covenant and discipleship. It is that liturgical act of remembrance in which those who have responded to Christ find renewal in their identity and purpose as disciples of Jesus, the Church. It is through the ritual practice of the Eucharist that the Church is able to stay rooted in the Narrative, remember who it is, and through the bread and cup continue to become the people God calls them to be. To see how this works we must appreciate some of its liturgical dimensions.

**LITURGY**

The Eucharist is a Christian liturgical practice, and in order to more fully understand its theological and ecclesial meaning we need to understand it liturgically. The importance of liturgy cannot be overemphasized. While liturgy is correctly

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278 Ibid., 261.
279 The question of whether the Eucharist is ‘open’ or ‘closed’ will be discussed more thoroughly in chapter four.
associated with worship it needs to be understood as more than a way to refer to corporate worship; to reduce liturgy to what we do on a Sunday worship misses the point. Working with Brueggemann’s notion of worship mentioned above, liturgy can also be understood more comprehensively as the system in which the gathered seeks to further become the New Humanity and fulfil their ecclesial purpose. Liturgy is the means by which we achieve worship. As Bria articulates it, liturgy is missional in nature as it serves the ultimate purpose of the Church by transforming the gathered to be witnesses to the risen Christ and God’s eschatological vision. The value of liturgy lies not only in its beauty and solemnity, but even more in its ability, in the midst of history, to open the horizon of the kingdom of God for all humanity. Here history meets eschatology, church meets cosmos, sacred meets secular, redeemed meets unredeemed. The liturgy invites both Christians and non-Christians to this encounter between God and God’s people in the name of Jesus Christ.

Vatican II’s *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* concurs, stating that liturgy “is the summit towards which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the fount from which all her power flows” for it is there, through liturgical practices, that the Church is grounded in its identity and purpose, the source of its ecclesial and spiritual life, the Triune God.

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280 ‘System’ is used very intentionally. Liturgy can be simple and elegant but also deep and complex. If we are speaking of the typical place we experience liturgy, that being our Sunday morning services, liturgy is composed of various components including normative songs, sermon, and prayers. Yet liturgy encompasses how we use these and other elements such as space, dress, language, and movement to create an enactment of that goal. ‘System’ describes how these elements interact with each other in order to meet a desired purpose.

281 Liturgy can also be seen to exist outside of Sunday services; it can, understood this broadly, include anything through which we come to serve God’s creational telos. Sermon, song, prayer, and other means of worship need to be seen alongside justice making, art, political engagement, spiritual practices, hospitality and environmental care, to name only a few.


283 Ibid., 319.

The goal of liturgy is to immerse God's people in God's gospel story in such a way that his people will be able to live out the mission of Jesus in their everyday lives. The church gathers on Sundays to be renewed, and to receive strength for its mission that its members carry out while being dispersed in all segments of society from Monday to Saturday. . . . Liturgy stands in the service of this renewal.  

Liturgy, as it will be used here, is the system by which the Church continually transforms itself into a people who are one, missional and holy.

The Eucharist is not only a liturgical practice but can be understood as illustrative of liturgy itself, for the purpose of the rite is to situate the Church in its identity and purpose. By taking into account the origins of the Eucharist and the components of its theological meaning (as seen within the Synoptics and Paul), we can see how the Eucharist functions liturgically. These components can be broken down into the following: gathering, epiclesis, anamnesis, bread and wine, prolepsis and oblation. These are not, of course, all the liturgical components of Eucharistic practice. Others such as the Lord’s Prayer, sursum corda and doxology, are also important and liturgically functional. However, for the purposes of this study, focussed as it is on the identity and purpose of the Church, I wish to focus on the more explicit theologically rooted concepts of Eucharistic liturgical practice. Thus, I am suggesting, any Eucharistic liturgy, in order to reach its fullest potential for liturgically transforming the Church into its sacramental calling, should include variations of each of the following: gathering, epiclesis, anamnesis, bread and wine, prolepsis and oblation.

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GATHERING

The act of gathering together is the most basic element of the Eucharist but by no means the least important. Reminiscent of the coming together for Levi’s party or the disciples coming together in the Upper Room, gathering together as a community around a common table is a vital aspect any Eucharist. Gathering is not only visually symbolic of the fact that what is taking place is of communal importance, but is also indicative of the unity of the Church itself. The Eucharist brings a common group around a common focus. This is important for several reasons. By coming together to celebrate the Eucharist the community is enabled, if not even forced, to acknowledge its communal identity. By acknowledging their communal nature the gathered are confronted with the state of their community and challenged to cross boundaries, reconcile divisions, embrace diversity and take the action necessary to become the one people Paul so strongly encouraged the Corinthians to be (1 Cor 12:27). Even more to the point, gathering together to celebrate the Eucharist reminds the community that the Eucharist is not a practice for the individual but for the community. “A prime and normative meaning of the Christian ritual meal is an ecclesial meaning, namely, that around this table is gathered the body of Christ to proclaim, to realize, and to celebrate itself as such.”

Gathering together focuses the Church on the task at hand of bringing to the forefront the importance of becoming one people in Christ.

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EPICLESIS

Within most traditional Eucharistic liturgies there exists an *epiclesis*, an ‘invocation’ of the Holy Spirit. Seen as reminiscent of the *birkat ha-mazon*, a Jewish prayer for restoration, and of the *maranatha* choruses of 1 Cor 16:22, Rev 22:20, John 11:52 and 17:20-24, the *epiclesis* is an important constitutive aspect of the Eucharist. Just as those choruses of ‘Come, Lord Jesus’ sought the presence of the Risen Christ (Rev 22:20), the *epiclesis* seeks the presence of the Holy Spirit. Through the invoking of the Spirit of Life, the *epiclesis* transforms the Eucharist from a human to a divine, and thus sacred, meal.287 Whatever form the *epiclesis* takes, the invocation of the Holy Spirit is a vital part of the Eucharist for it centres the rite in the transformative power of the Spirit.288 As Haight states, the pneumatological character of the Eucharist effectualizes the sacrament by placing it within economy of salvation.289 Primavesi and Henderson further state:

The Holy Spirit unites, hallows and transforms [the bodiliness of Christ and the bodiliness of ourselves], both in themselves and in relation to each other. The Spirit comes upon them and hallows them. Hallowing enables them to fulfil the purpose for which they are created. The Holy Spirit hallowed the body of Jesus that he might be called the Son of God. The Holy Spirit hallows our bodies that we might become the body of Christ and be called the children of God.290

It is one part of our liturgies we cannot go without for it brings the gathered before the God with whom we have aligned our wills, asking to be indwelled with the Spirit of Life. The *epiclesis* can thus be seen as a plea for God to enter into our communities and transform them from the inside out, challenging those present to be united in fellowship,

287 Crockett, *Eucharist*, 55.
289 Ibid., 212.
active in proclamation and service, and holy in the Spirit’s leading. The *epiclesis* is the request for the divine power to be the incarnational prolongation of Christ in this world. The *epiclesis* grounds the Church in its divine identity and purpose. The *epiclesis* makes the meal a Eucharist – sacred, binding the gathered to each other, to God, to the purpose with which they were created.

**ANAMNESIS**

*Anamnesis* is another vital element of the Eucharist. As previously discussed, *anamnesis* or recapitulation is a very specific method of remembrance by which the past is brought to the present and made effective. *Anamnesis* is not salvific in its own right but effects past salvific act(s) of faith in the sense of affirmation, renewal and reorientation. Jones, using the Hebrew word *zakar* (soulful remembering), puts it as such:

> When a soul remembers something, it does not mean that it has objective images of remembrance of a thing or an event, but that the thing or event is called forth in the soul and that the thing or event in question contributes to the direction and activity of the will. In other words, a person who remembers God allows his or her entire being and activity to be directed by God. Therefore, to remember God is identical with seeking God, and that is to say to obey God. Remembrance or recollection cannot be separated from action. . . . That a person remembers God means that he or she is placed in a context – a context which consists of God’s activity in the past and of God’s will for the present and the future.292

To remember the Narrative in such a fashion is to place oneself within it. *Anamnesis* can thus be described as a call to action or an awakening of the soul. As one remembers the Narrative in which their faith is rooted they become realigned with the values, purpose, trajectory and identity found within it;293 their souls awaken to the vision of that

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eschatological future, (re)creating that yearning and drive to see its fulfilment. Murphy-O’Connor elaborates:

To remember Jesus authentically is to become aware, not merely of his historical existence, but of the meaning of his life and in particular his death. . . . Remembering, therefore, involves an element of gratitude, but more especially it incorporates an acceptance of the responsibility of prolonging the saving mission of Christ. Christian remembrance is concerned with the past only insofar as it is constitutive of the present and a summons to the future. In the active remembrance of total commitment to Christ the past is made real in the present and its power is released to shape the future.294

In the context of the Eucharist, anamnesis functions liturgically by placing the gathered in an active memory of their creational identity and purpose as the New Humanity. It is an ‘active’ memory because through recalling the past they are reminded of the future and presently challenged to further conform to and work towards that end. Anamnesis continually places the Church within its Narrative and, in doing so, its identity and purpose. Without a constant grounding in the Christian Narrative the purpose and identity of the Church loses its divine characteristics and ceases to offer the very thing that makes the Church unique – a stability and coherence rooted in the very nature of humanity. If we cease to remember we become synonymous with any humanitarian organization.295 It is in this anamnetic atmosphere that the Church approaches the bread and wine.

295 Something to explore when we contemplate declining attendance in the pews, especially amongst 20-40 year olds, is whether or not we are rooting ourselves in the Narrative and whether or not that is being conveyed to those who walk through the doors of our churches thereby making participation in church distinct and unique from volunteering with any given charity.
BREAD AND WINE

The breaking of the bread and the pouring of wine are an elemental aspect of the Eucharistic rite. The bread, wine and the words of institution spoken over them by Jesus are symbolic of his invitation to faith and new life. Their consumption is thus a symbolic re-enactment of having received that new life and faith. Eating the bread and the wine, interpreted as Christ’s body and blood in light of the words of institution, are a confirmation of the gathered’s commitment to be and become the Body of Christ and participate with the Triune God’s redemptive work in the world. To understand the liturgical function of the bread and wine we state our presuppositions about them: we understand the bread as the symbolic body of Christ and that our consumption of it is a statement of becoming one with Christ and those who share the broken loaf. We understand the wine as the symbolic blood of Christ; it is an offer of a new eschatological covenant to those who drink from the cup. The liturgical function of the bread and wine is kenotic and therefore one of renewal, or as Minear puts it, of ‘recreation.’

As 1st Corinthians reveals, the Eucharist was understood to ground and sustain the Church in a very particular identity and purpose. There is, therefore, at least in Pauline eucharistic theology, the assertion that the Eucharistic practice of taking the bread and the wine liturgically orients the community in Christ and thus transforms them

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296 I am not of the opinion that bread and wine must be used in the Eucharist, per se. There are far too many pastoral concerns surrounding their use that forces us to consider substitutions. Dietary restrictions such as glutton allergies regarding the bread, and sensibilities around alcoholism regarding the wine are two of the most important. While bread and wine do possess symbolic merit in that they respectively convey meanings of nourishment and joy and provide important insights into how Jesus is the source of that nourishment and joy, these pastoral concerns are significant and worthy of consideration. In addition, other cultural contexts may suggest or even necessitate substitutions.

into the Body of Christ. Paul stresses that the Corinthian community should partake in the “real” Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:20) because he understood that the true Supper recreates or renews the community in the faith they have had all along, challenging divergent behaviours such as idolatry, immorality and blasphemy found in self-centred, self-seeking, self-assertive and self-aggrandizing motives. The bread and the wine are given as the means to reorient the divided and struggling community around its shared faith and vision of ecclesiality. The eating of the bread and wine is not simply a religious exercise but a schematic for our lives in the sense that it helps us look backward to the finished act of salvation on the cross that provides an anchor for our lives, forward to our future in consummation, inward as we examine our heart and lives and confess our sins before God, upward as we realize he is now at God’s right hand, enabling us to ‘set our mind on things above’ (Col 3:1-4), around us as we realize the community that makes corporate worship possible, and outward as we proclaim the Lord’s death to a world dying in sin.

As acts of committal, the bread and the wine synchronize the gathered with Christ, becoming what they eat. “When we feast at the Eucharist,” Mitchell states, “we consume Christ entirely – his attitudes, his outlook, his values, his example – and we allow him to transform and to challenge our everyday lives. Thus, the Eucharist is not

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298 Perhaps some clarification regarding the word ‘transform’ is in order. This is not to say that the Eucharist is constitutive of ecclesiality in the sense that prior to the bread and wine there is no ecclesiality. Rather, ‘transforms’ speaks to the continual sanctification of the Church into an ecclesiality that is at once possessed but continuously gained. As the Church is paradoxically righteous and sinful, this transformation keeps orienting the Church in that righteousness thereby bringing it further and further into a more holistic state of ecclesiality. And, of course, this is to say nothing of the long and complex debates regarding real presence, transubstantiation and the like.


300 Osbourne, Matthew, 970.

only a sacramental activity of the Church but also an ongoing practice that nurtures and sustains ‘eucharistic living.’”302 As Sumney puts it

coming to this table involves a commitment of one’s life to God, a commitment to live a life patterned on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The focus of the elements is squarely on the death of Jesus and that is how the early Church understood it. It is the reminder of the body and blood of Christ given for us (however we might understand that). There is a level of cognition and mental development and commitment necessary to take part in such a reminder appropriately.303

The bread and the wine with the words of institution remind the gathered not only of their faith commitment but also the grace and nourishment Christ offers. The Eucharistic bread and wine, and indeed the entire rite itself, is thus not a meal for the righteous and perfect but precisely the opposite – it is a meal for the tired, weary and broken. It is there that the Church confesses its humanity and becomes strengthened in community, enlivened by the Spirit and nourished by the bread of life.

To summarize, the bread nourishes the gathered with divine satisfaction, joins the gathered to Christ in whom they have ‘clothed themselves’ and reminds them of their common bond to each other and to God, calling them to transcend their differences, embrace their diversity and sit together, accepted and loved, as God intended.304 The wine gladdens the heart with divine joy, reminds the gathered of the divine covenant they have joined through Christ and of their obligation to be a holy and missional people. The bread and wine of the Eucharist are of essential importance to the Eucharist for they

304 Haight, Ecclesial Existence, 212.
liturgically function to draw the gathered further into their Narrative and into their sacramental nature.

PROLEPSIS AND OBLATION

Prolepsis (expectant hope / anticipation) and oblation (offering) are the final essential aspects of the Eucharist. They emphatically state that the Eucharist is just the beginning, that it is not a rite with no consequence. These aspects help the gathered come to “the full realization [that] ritual celebration continues beyond what takes place in church.” Rather, the Eucharist “continues as the assembly is sent forth to live out this eucharistic mystery in the world of every day life.” Prolepsis functions to drive the gathered forward through their anticipation of that eschatological telos by being an oblation to that end. As Daly states, this aspect of the Eucharist acts as a commissioning, or perhaps more aptly put, a missioning; similar to a benediction, it sends out the gathered, recreated and renewed as the New Humanity, nourished and joyful in Christ, to fulfil their creational intent of stewarding creation towards God’s vision of shalom. Prolepsis and oblation are an essential aspect of the Eucharist because through them the gathered leave the table knowing how their story ends, and with that hope and assurance, they are able to offer themselves as a living Eucharist to the world.

PARTICIPATORY ECCLESIOLOGY  
IN LIGHT OF THE EUCHARIST  

These six aspects of the Eucharist – liturgy, gathering, epiclesis, anamnesis, bread and wine, prolepsis and oblation – come together to enable the Eucharist to reach its liturgical function. While there can be a great deal of freedom in how they are enacted, each aspect plays a significant role in enabling the Eucharist to achieve its liturgical goal, one fundamentally about discipleship and praxis. Taking into account the Eucharist’s theological and liturgical aspects, it becomes clear that the practice is intended for the Church. The Eucharist furthers the Church’s transformation into the Body of Christ, and fosters its sacramentality through drawing out the ecclesial marks. The Eucharist therefore centres the Church in its ‘ecclesial self,’ bringing it into its identity and purpose of participation in God’s vision of shalom.

A Christian understanding of human personhood receives its shape and pattern from the triune God. The human vocation is to learn to see and act rightly by participating in the mystery of the triune life of God. Moreover, knowing the triune God and learning to see and act rightly are inseparable from participating in the Christian community and its practices. Human personhood is thus the formation of a particular people who, empowered by the Spirit, live the pattern of Jesus’ life praxis.  

A Participatory Ecclesiology sees such a self-understanding as the foundation of the nature of the Church. The Church is composed of people who are being restored to their creational identity and purpose through a kenotic act of faith in Jesus Christ. What Medley calls the ‘ecclesial self’ is this sense of identity rooted in that purpose of participation. If we gain our ecclesial selfhood through kenosis and perichoresis it is through that participation in God’s vision that ecclesiality arises. In being the New

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307 Medley, “Do This,” 383.
Humanity there is a clear priority on behalf of the Church to continually seek the fulfillment of that selfhood.

The Eucharist is a central means to enabling and sustaining our ecclesial self. The Eucharist can be seen as a foundational liturgical practice in the Church’s pursuit of its marks and sacramental nature. While other aspects of Christian worship are indeed liturgically significant,

the important thing about the Eucharist is the real participation of Christ in the practice and how the Eucharist enables our participation in a godly life. … The Eucharist not only tells a story but performs a story. As such the story is not descriptive but prescriptive; it gives us a way to walk and a way to see. As Micheal de Certeau says, the story ‘opens a legitimate theatre for practical actions.’

We can take de Certeau’s comments further and say the Eucharist itself, in its entirety, opens up a theatre for practical action in God’s vision, for it is here that the gathered hear the call to new life and respond by being further conformed to the marks of the Church. It is in that participation that, as Cavanaugh states, the Church becomes what it is eschatologically. Wainwright follows suit stating, “from the eschatological perspective, … the Eucharist is more important for what it makes us than for what it expresses as being already true of us.”

Looking now at how the Eucharist draws out the ecclesial marks thus bringing the Church into its sacramental nature, we can further see how the Eucharist is a vital and constitutive ecclesial practice.

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308 Medley, “Do This,” 389.
THE LITURGICAL CONSTITUTION OF THE MARKS
OF THE CHURCH IN THE EUCHARIST

ONE

The unity of the Church is constituted in the Eucharist. It is through the gathering together and the sharing of the bread and wine that the Church’s unified identity may be actualized. As Haight states, the Eucharist leads the gathered into such a characteristic:

The sharing of the one cup in a given place demonstrates and effects the oneness of the sharers with Christ and with their fellow sharers in all times and places. . . . The Eucharistic celebration demands reconciliation and sharing among all those regarded as brothers and sisters in the one family of God and is a constant challenge in the search for appropriate relationships in social, economic, and political life. Eucharist practice within the church community sets up a bond of solidarity in love as the context of human existence. 311

Symbolically sharing a meal necessitates an intimate encountering each other and calls us to look beyond the differences and past grievances to identify each other in love as brothers and sisters in Christ. Placing the gathered ‘in Christ’ attests to the Eucharist’s ability to draw out the oneness of the Church. The situation described by Paul in Corinth is a perfect example of how the Eucharist, properly and sincerely administered and practiced, can foster this kind of unity. It is the corporate nature of the Eucharist that challenges the Church and its members to realize that “the idea of an autonomous Christian is a contradiction in terms” and “believers are what they are because they belong to something greater than themselves.” 312

The sharing of the bread and wine conveys this calling for the Church to be the kind of community Bell and Golden described as being dramatically diverse and

311 Haight, Ecclesial Existence, 213.
312 Murphy-O’Connor, “Eucharist and Community,” 5.
colourful amidst radical unity. The Eucharist provides the vision to be united and not in theological self-contradiction with the faith and vision the Church confesses. Such a unity is sacramental because it flies in the face of division and conformity and symbolizes the creational intent and potential of humanity, thereby juxtaposing God’s vision with the reality the world experiences. As Moltmann writes: “Wherever God’s people gather the Kingdom is proclaimed. It’s as rainbowed hued and diversified as creation was in the beginning. Ecclesiastical uniformity suppresses the pluralism of the Holy Spirit.” As people leave the Eucharist they can do so with the vision of community they strive to obtain.

MISSIONAL

While the missional mark is equally all-encompassing, what can be stated here is how the Eucharist empowers those gathered to fulfil their creational identity and purpose. It is in the Eucharist that the gathered hear of the vision of shalom and how Jesus is the eschatological way, the truth and the life (John 14:6). In the Eucharist the gathered hear that vision and recognize Jesus as the means to that life, thereby creating the opportunity to become inspired and aligned with it. They receive there the nourishment and strength to participate in that vision. Stookey writes

The future of God is not some escapist notion that allows us to make peace with unrighteousness on earth; instead it is the divine tug that motivates the reform of the present state of things. . . . Those who glimpse the kingdom in the kingdom meal called the Eucharist therefore strive to do already on earth what they have envisioned to be done in the kingdom.”

313 Bell and Golden, Jesus Wants to Save Christians, 155. See also, pg. 60, above.
314 Jürgen Moltmann, Jesus Christ in Today’s World (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 147.
315 Stookey, Eucharist, 26.
By placing the Church in that vision, the Eucharist, through the *epiclesis, anamnesis,* bread and wine, *prolepsis* and oblation challenges those who partake in the rite to actually *be* the kind of people they confess and *do* the work expected of them. Therein lies the great pastoral and prophetic power of the practice. Not only does the Eucharist offer a call to action, it also offers nourishment and renewal needed to maintain such a life. Such a renewal and nourishment is needed for congregations fed up with their social justice mandates and projects due to the burden and exhaustion often associated with the work of the Church. Within the Eucharist motivation and strength can be found to continue our work.

The Eucharist has a certain affinity towards bolstering the missional mark of the Church. Partaking in the broken bread and poured cup we identify ourselves as the Body of Christ, we can be seen as an embodiment of Christ and therefore we are called to go out and be for the world as he was for his. Recalling Eucharist as ‘good gift’ (derived from *eucharizomai*), Bell and Golden see the Eucharist as a missional catalyst, for it calls the Church to be the same ‘good gift’ to the world that Christ was, figuratively allowing her body to be broken and blood to be shed for the sake of the world.316 There is a distinct missional implication within this understanding of the Eucharist. As a Eucharistic Church our destiny, our future, [and] our joy are in the Eucharist, [and we use] whatever blessing we’ve received, whatever resources, talents, skills and passions God has given us, to make the world a better place. . . . The Eucharist is an invitation to be the new humanity. To suffer, to bleed, to open the heart, to roll up our sleeves, to have hope that God has a plan to put the world back together and its called the Church.317

Quoting Robert J. Schreiter, Cuban theologian Ofelia Ortega reminds us:

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316 Bell and Golden, *Jesus Wants to Save Christians,* 150. We can recall here Kervin’s insight on Matt 4:19 (see pg. 66).
317 Ibid., 163
when we receive the cup in the Eucharist, we are making some very strong commitments. ... When eucharistic ministers and believers offer and receive the cup in communion, saying ‘the blood of Christ’ and affirming it with ‘Amen’, they must ask themselves: Are we ready to take on the sufferings of Christ’s living body? Do we have the courage to offer that cup of suffering to one another, knowing that to follow Jesus will bring us into conflict and adversity? Holding up and receiving that cup is a commitment to sharing in the deepest solidarity with the victims of this world – those who undergo pain, those who must await redemption. \(^{318}\)

The Eucharist, viewed in this way, challenges the Church to rise up to the call of being like Christ, to being his presence in the world, and be, as he was, a glimpse of what the Kingdom of God is like. The Church as an embodiment of Christ’s table fellowship is an appropriate image here. The Eucharist strengthens the Church to be the same kind of place that Jesus’ table was – a place of radical solidarity, love, hospitality, mutuality, inclusivity, and acceptance, a place where one is freely able to experience and respond to the grace of God. \(^{319}\)

**HOLY**

The Eucharist also holds the power to liturgically transform the gathered into a holy people, a kind of people who reflect their creational image and likeness, live by the standards of that eschatological reality, and who participate in God’s vision of *shalom* by being ‘other.’ As Osbourne states above, the Eucharist provides a schematic for holy living. From engagement with it we are challenged to be stewards of *shalom* in every aspect of our lives and world. The Eucharist nourishes, inspires, and enlivens the congregation to find the freedom from personal and systemic sin through responding to


\(^{319}\) Moltmann, *Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 258.
God’s grace by being holy. Within holiness love, justice, compassion, mercy and hospitality are experienced, and self-promotion, hatred, apathy and division are worked against. The Eucharist prepares the gathered for that kind of life by placing them within the Narrative and providing the opportunity for restoration and nourishment with which to live their story out. Equally important, the Eucharist confers knowledge and reception of God’s grace when we know all too well that we have fallen short of the holiness we are called to strive after.

**SACRAMENTALITY**

Ecclesiality, I have argued, stems from the participation of those who have given their lives over to the Way of Jesus in the eschatological vision of God. This participation, seen through the embodiment of the marks of ecclesiality, allows the Church to achieve its highest calling, that of sacramentality. The Church is sacramental in that through its very existence it points towards the eschatological vision of God by embodying (as humanly as possible) that vision for the world to encounter and experience. This sacramentality is not a natural by-product of faith but a result of praxis and takes commitment and discipline. Given the paradoxical state of the Church, in order to sustain praxis a means of renewal and grace is necessary. By consistently rooting and renewing the gathered in their faith, the Eucharist, through its various functions and components, evokes and bestows the ecclesial marks. The Eucharist, in sum, renews ecclesiality. As Medley articulates it:

> the practice of the Eucharist repeatedly expresses the movement toward perfecting, or re-creating, our humanity in the image and likeness of God. . . . The liturgical and sacramental life of the church offers to the self-in-community a way by which and with which to experience, practice, and nurture God’s good gift of

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320 Ibid., 261.
transforming and transfiguring grace. In particular, eucharistic practice is the means by which our thanksgiving to God is a practice of the Christian self. Augustine was correct when he wrote that when we receive the Eucharist, ‘we receive who we are’ or, as Anderson states, ‘we practice what we are becoming.’

Who we are and what we are becoming is the Church. It is being and becoming a people who strive to be united beyond all distinctions, a people who strive to steward the world toward a vision of shalom, and a people who strive to live in accordance with a divine standard. Who the Church is and who the Church is becoming is, in spite of its flaws and brokenness, is a glimpse of God’s future world, a world restored back to God’s creational intent and purpose, a world in which shalom reigns. The Church can achieve this sacramentality through the Eucharist because it orients the Church towards that purpose. The Eucharist, therefore, is an essential liturgical practice for such sacramentality to be appropriated and sustained.

The Eucharist is a liturgical act, developed out of reflection on the table fellowship and Last Supper of Jesus Christ. It aids the Church in remembering and becoming who it is called to be in a world where so many narratives fight for our attention and allegiance. Through its key aspects of gathering, invoking, remembering, eating and drinking, and going forth, the Eucharist enacts for us a pledge of faith to the God who created us in God’s image and likeness and recalls us into life as it was meant to be. It is through living that life that the Church becomes sacramental, opening up through embodiment God’s eschatological future for all. The Eucharist enables the Church to be the kind of people God calls us to be. It enables us to be the Body of Christ, the New Humanity, the Church.

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321 Medley, “Do This,” 397.
CHAPTER FOUR: 
SO WHAT?

Dr. Brad Cross asked the same question of every single historic event discussed during his American History course at St. Thomas University: ‘So what?’ The question was meant to draw out the contemporary significance and implications of the event. It is not enough, he argued, to simply know the historical fact; the purpose of historical inquiry, rather, was to understand how the past shapes and informs the present. I ask ‘so what?’ of theological inquiry with a very similar purpose; it is not enough to simply state theological theories and presuppositions. Rather, the purpose of theological inquiry is to shape and inform human spirituality and life. I ask ‘so what?’ of a participatory ecclesiology rooted in the Eucharist because such a question recognizes this teleological facet of theology and holds the given ecclesiology to that standard. ‘So what’ asks, to put it another way, is it a matter of praxis? Theology is fundamentally about praxis insofar as theology is not a field that has little to no impact on the world outside the academic or conceptual arena – it is not a static and isolated endeavour. Theology, rather, is dynamic, expansive, engaging and subjective; it is a field birthed directly out of personal and communal reflection on God’s interaction with humanity and creation, the very basis of human spirituality. Theology is fundamentally about praxis for it is the ‘making sense’ of this divine-human relationship which naturally entails a core component of practice.\(^{322}\)

To ask ‘so what?’ of this thesis is to ask of its relevance to the contemporary Church and bring to the surface remaining questions and implications of a participatory ecclesiology rooted in the Eucharist. While there are many from which to choose, I will

\(^{322}\) In this sense, ‘practical theology’ is something of an oxymoron for all theology is practical, albeit to different levels of comprehension and application.
focus on three here: that it orients the Church around an identity and purpose in a time of apparent ecclesial amnesia; that is addresses important liturgical questions regarding our practice of the Eucharist; and that it adds a voice to a dialogue calling for greater collaboration between liturgists and ecclesiologists.

SO WHAT?

BE WHO WE ARE CALLED TO BE

As argued in the first chapter, the contemporary Church is facing a crisis of ecclesial amnesia in that it seems to have forgotten its ecclesial identity and purpose. Such a crisis is, in part, rooted in an uncritical subscription to the postmodern milieu, a worldview which challenges the role of a single narrative in one’s sense of identity and purpose. The inevitable result is a saturated or disappearing self, an existence with no sense of stability and coherence. The Church, I have argued, is experiencing ecclesial amnesia because it is struggling with this postmodern condition. This being the case, we find many churches at a point of conjecture: do we fully adapt to this milieu and expand our identity and purpose by including and accommodating other narratives, or do we attempt to rediscover our true identity and purpose through (re)engagement with our own narrative? This paper has advocated the latter and put forth a view of the Eucharist as a means to anchor the Church in that ecclesial identity and purpose. The answer to ‘so what?’ is precisely this: a participatory ecclesiology rooted in the praxis of the Eucharist responds to this perceived crisis by empowering the Church to be the kind of people we are called to be.

A participatory ecclesiology and its liturgical emphasis on the Eucharist does this by putting forth the Eucharist as a means to orient the Church in its ecclesial memory and
respond by realigning ourselves with the vision we encounter there. The answer to ‘so what?’ is that the Eucharist provides the answer to ‘who are we?’ It does so by placing the Church in a liturgical practice that holds the potential to transform it to be the kind of people who are one, missional and holy. How might this actually be accomplished? One of the means to do this is to rethink our Eucharistic practices and enquire whether or not such practices empower the gathered to embody one or more of those ecclesial marks.

While it is not the agenda of this paper to offer and critique Eucharistic liturgies, per se, I do wish to put forth an example which exemplifies one creative means of empowering the gathered to embody the ecclesial mark of oneness.

Consider the words of institution offered by the Rev. Dr. Brad Braxton to his Riverside Church in New York City:

The body of Christ has AIDS. Do not come to eat of this bread and drink of this cup unless you too now are willing to have AIDS. For in this meal we celebrate the blood of Jesus. The body of Christ has a blood disease that’s killing millions. Come. This is my body, broken for you. Take and eat. This is my blood pouring out for you, pouring out into you. Take and drink and know that you too have AIDS.  

It is a bold and provocative way to invite the gathered to celebrate the Eucharist. The virus needs little introduction. HIV/AIDS is a disease that has, perhaps more than any other, brought stigma, marginalization and shame to those who have the virus. Its perceived affiliation with the homosexual community only serves to sharpen the sensitivities and prejudice around it. Very intentionally, Braxton’s words of institution brings before the congregation all of the fear and stigma affiliated with HIV/AIDS and all its associations; the mere mention of AIDS brings all of that history and association to

mind, and Braxton’s call to ‘have AIDS’ makes it that much more audacious and scandalous. For our purposes, the rest of the liturgy is not necessary to appreciate how this Eucharist is geared towards the mark of oneness through calling the gathered to be a community of radical solidarity.

The implication of Braxton’s version of the words of institution is abundantly and painfully clear: that those who sit, eat and drink will “be infected” with the AIDS virus. Within the invitation is a clear statement that speaks to the depth of that oneness to which the Church is called. Those who call themselves the Body of Christ are to be in such intimate oneness or unity with those who have HIV/AIDS that it is as if they have the disease themselves.\footnote{We can take HIV/AIDS to be representative of all who are marginalized and stigmatized regardless of reason.} It is important to note how this call to unity, specifically in the vein of solidarity, is far deeper than mere support or recognition. It is a unity found in a mutuality that transcends feelings of charity, pity, recognition, or advocacy and speaks of understanding and of ‘being with.’

Recalling Jesus’ own table fellowship, we can further appreciate what this solidarity looks like. Jesus’ general attitude towards those with whom he eats is not one of mere sympathy, condescension or charity but of love, empathy, equality and mutuality. As Mediterranean table culture suggested, to eat with ‘tax collectors and sinners’ was to be one of them and to recognize them as human. The Church is to be that place where intimate solidarity is found in the recognition of shared humanity.

Mark 1:35-46 provides another illustration, perhaps one even more poignant. Jesus touches a leper (v. 41). Jesus does not seem to care that touching a leper risks contracting the disease. He is more focused on recognizing the person’s humanity and
does so through the very human gesture of touch, a gesture which indicates that he would risk contracting leprosy for the sake of being with the man. Braxton’s ‘re-mixing’ of the words of institution points the Church to the example of Jesus and calls it to embody that same oneness in solidarity. These bold and provocative words of institution call the Church to strive for a depth of community that points towards a human community where love, acceptance, understanding and solidarity are the distinguishing characteristics, a community that moves beyond charity to solidarity and mutuality.

Braxton’s words of institution are shown here because they reveal how a creative and provocative remixing of the Eucharistic aspects can be used to draw out aspects of the nature of the Church, thereby empowering it to find, articulate and understand its ecclesial identity and purpose. As suggested earlier, in many liturgical traditions, there is great freedom in how Eucharistic liturgies are put together and one can devise further ways to provide illustrations and associations to help the Church become the kind of people they are called to be. Remixing the Eucharistic liturgical components can help take what is often a tired, misunderstood or poorly practice and breathe new life into it, allowing it to transform the Church into the people they are called to be.

**SO WHAT? OPEN YET CLOSED**

It can be argued that the interpretation of the Eucharist put forth here is ‘closed’ in that the Eucharist is a practice meant to strengthen and nourish the Body of Christ, and is therefore not for non-believers. Its liturgical purpose is to transform the Church into a community that is sacramental. As Farwell states, “The eucharistic meal is the place where the disciples continue to gather in intimate communion with Jesus Christ and from
which they are empowered to move out into wider ministries of evangelism and service, including a ministry of eating and drinking in contexts beyond the bounds of this ritual practice.”

The answer to ‘so what?’ is this: such an interpretation raises some important questions by pointing to an apparent contradiction: how do we reconcile the ‘closed’ nature of the Eucharist with the ‘open’ mission of the Church, especially given the fact that the time at which we practice the Eucharist is in corporate worship, arguably a time when the Church needs to be the most open to those who desire to encounter it.

The answer cannot be, as Farwell advocates, to actually turn seekers and visitors away from the table. Farwell and Sumney’s arguments for a completely exclusive table fail because they do not take into account the apparent contradiction with the Church’s sacramental nature. To argue that offering communion to seekers and observers is “hurtful” and “inhospitable” because it belittles the Eucharist and short-changes the seekers is incoherent, boxes in the Holy Spirit, contradicts the significance of Jesus’ table fellowship, and, most importantly, compromises the overall sacramental character of the Church. The openness of the Church, derived from sacramentality, should not be jeopardized. It is, after all, the table of Christ and, as his table fellowship and life taught, openness and self-sacrifice are found in him. Katherine Tanner responds directly to Farwell arguing that seekers and the curious should be allowed at the table because, even if they do not fully understand the Eucharist, they can experience through it “the radical inclusiveness and the unconditional offer of life-transforming grace” of Jesus and thereby discover the desire to be aligned with such a community.

Supporting her argument is

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326 See: Farwell, 227, 233 and Jerry L. Sumney, “A Communion Table for the Baptised.”
the fact that the disciples themselves, let alone those at Levi’s party, at times clearly
didn’t understand many things Jesus said and did. If the Church is to be sacramental in
everything it does, that God’s future may be seen and experienced, its very practice of the
Eucharist must reflect this.

What then are we to do? How does one remain open yet honour the Eucharist’s
intended purpose? What are practical means to balance this open yet closed nature of the
Eucharist? The answer does not and cannot lie in doing away with a theologically
focused meaning of the Eucharist so as not to offend or intimidate seekers and visitors.
Removing specific Trinitarian language or reference to Christ strips away the divine
nature of the meal; it is, to be sure, a Christian worship service. A carte blanche openness
to the Eucharist, therefore, compromises the nature of the Church insofar as it risks
stripping away the very Narrative in which it is grounded. The Eucharist and the worship
service itself must retain its Christian ethos as it conveys the Christian Narrative and
offers an alternative vision and understanding of what it means to be human. Stripping
away the story would actually be disingenuous and a disservice to those seekers and
visitors as it does not take seriously their desire to experience and encounter something
greater and different.\textsuperscript{328} Instead, we must both honour our story and sacramental purpose
by retaining the substance of the Eucharist, and find ways to honour the spiritual
yearnings and curiosities of the seekers. The answer therefore lies in the content of the
liturgy itself.

Creating creative, contextually relevant, powerful Eucharistic liturgies will help
us find the balance between the Church’s open nature and the Eucharist’s closed (or
focused) meaning. It is in through such a balance that both believers and seekers can

\textsuperscript{328} Farwell, “Baptism, Eucharist and the Hospitality of Jesus,” 224.
gather together at the table of Jesus and together encounter the risen Christ. While space does not permit a fuller exploration here, we can highlight a few key considerations. We should begin our approach by creating our liturgies, Eucharistic or otherwise, with the sacramental nature and purpose of the Church in the forefront of our minds. As appropriate as it is to consider believers as the focus of our liturgies, we must never forget that those seeking a narrative that makes sense and which offers stability and coherence will find their way to our worship services. They too must be taken into consideration.\textsuperscript{329} Our liturgies – their language, dress, ritual, music, space and message – should all be done with both the congregation and the seekers in mind. Our pastoral sensitivities need to extend to both. The contemporary parlance of being “seeker-sensitive” has done well to raise this concern, regardless of the extremes that have sometimes been taken. Such an approach values the openness of the Church and takes precautions to keep to an appropriate minimum the dissonance seekers feel when walking into a Christian worship service for the first time.\textsuperscript{330}

The post-Christendom context of our culture is another reason for such a balanced liturgy; no longer can we assume people are Christian, ‘churched’ or have some level of comprehension of Christianity, Church and the Bible. Including in our liturgies and ecclesial practices some explanations of what is going on and why not only educates but also creates a less intimidating and more welcoming space for seekers and visitors. To be

\textsuperscript{329} This is a point many contemporary mainline churches may do well to take into consideration. As we are faced with declining numbers, we would do well to rethink whether our worship services are open enough to attract new members. It is not necessarily our theology and certainly not our story that must be changed, but rather, how we communicate it and what we do during worship. While important to honour tradition and what is meaningful to our current congregations, it is equally important to honour the culture we are in by adapting our liturgy and worship accordingly, therefore offering something that is meaningful to potential new members.

\textsuperscript{330} An “appropriate minimum” might refer to the fact that it remains obvious to the seekers that they are walking into a church.
truly open about who we are as Church means being open about what we believe and what we are doing. In addition, this benefits not only visitors, but also the gathered themselves; education fosters new understandings, critiques old assumptions and brings forth potential for renewal and nourishment in worship and life. Skilfully and subtly explaining what takes place at the Eucharist (or any other part of the liturgy) to the congregation can help honour the Eucharist’s intent and open it up for all who choose to participate.

This is a call to revisit, remix, and rewrite the liturgies to which we as worship leaders routinely turn with the task of the Eucharist in mind. How can we lead the gathered and all who walk through our doors into a truly transformative and inclusive encounter with Christ? Linking the sermon with the Eucharist, instead of allowing it to be a separate act, or through employing the various parts of the Eucharist to educate and invite, are but two means of how this can be accomplished. An example of the latter can be seen in this call to the table:

This is not my table. It’s not our table. This is the table of Jesus. He calls all who are lost and weak and he calls all who are found and strong to sit here with him; those who have found in him new life and those who simply want a place to sit or see what he is all about. This is his table and you are welcome here. It is here that those who call themselves fans and followers of Christ come to realign themselves with Jesus and it is here that those who just want to see what we are all about can catch a glimpse of the beauty, love, rest, and grace we believe Jesus offers. Come. Sit. Rest. Celebrate. You are most welcome.  

Such a simple and subtle call to table conveys to the gathered and the visitors that within the Eucharist lies the power to transform, therefore educating both believers and seekers alike on what takes place in the meal and why it is such an important practice.

331 Written by the author, Nick Coates, and used in ministry at table.
For another example we look to Mars Hill Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Not only does this exemplify an alternative way of practicing the Eucharist by weaving it into the sermon, but also speaks directly to the nourishment and peace that is to be found in table fellowship with Jesus. Embedded at the end of a sermon (which takes place at the end of the worship service) about how we can ‘press on’ through those burdens we carry (Phil 2:2-12) by finding grace, rest, companionship and freedom in Jesus, is the call to table:

I want to invite you. We have cups up here. We have bread. For us, the bread speaks of the body of Christ and the wine speaks of the blood of Christ. And sometimes there are defining moments in our journey when we decide I am not going to carry around the cement block one more day. You were not created to carry around those cement blocks and boards. You were created to be free and build something out of them. . . . Is there anyone here today that wants to press on? Today you can set those blocks and boards down and be free. I wonder if there is anyone who wants to come up and today, enter into a defining moment. Enough with carrying around that stuff.

Let’s pray: ‘God. We hear these words about pressing on. We hear how Paul reinterpreted his past, his present and his future in light of the resurrected Christ. The way he takes these blocks and boards of his own failure to get it, his own destructive acts, his own violence and he owns up to it. But in this totally beautiful way. [In] Christ he retells [his story] as a sign, symbol, evidence, saying ‘Even me . . . Christ dies and resurrects for even me. Grace and peace for even

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332 “Be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil 2:2-12).
me.’ Love and reconciliation for even us. God, today, we gather around this resurrected Christ. We lay these blocks and boards down so we can press on. In this excerpt can be seen a call to table that finds a balance between upholding the purpose of the Eucharist for those who have already found new life in Christ and those who may be seeking a place to unload their burdens, their ‘blocks and boards.’ It also highlights the table fellowship roots of the Eucharist, and how we can make radical inclusivity present at our table when remembering the meal Jesus shared with his disciples. Both of these examples show, albeit in a cursory way, that clever, innovative and sensitive planning can create Eucharistic liturgies and practices which honour both the open nature of the Church and the closed nature of the Eucharist. Both are vital to our existence as Church and it would do us well as worship leaders to find a balance that works in our respective contexts.

SO WHAT?
A CALL FOR DIALOGUE

As this thesis has attempted to argue, ecclesiality is fundamentally about praxis, and the praxis of ecclesiality leads to sacramentality. Praxis is understood here as the enacted and integrated embodiment of one’s theology. Put simply, praxis is active belief. That being the case, ecclesiology (and I would argue this goes for any ecclesiology, regardless of form or context) is built upon two foundations: people and theology. One cannot exist without the other. Theology without people renders the theology meaningless, and people without theology have no centre around which a community is to be oriented. If liturgy is the means by which we become a thriving praxis-based

333 Bell, Rob. “Blocks and Boards” Sermon. Mars Hill Church, Grand Rapids, 2010. Throughout the sermon various people walked to the stage and eventually made a table out of blocks and boards, from which the Eucharist was served.
community then it can be argued: ecclesiology cannot happen without liturgy and liturgy cannot happen without ecclesiology. It is a cyclical, interdependent relationship. Yet, despite this, many ecclesiologists are happy to focus on the theory leaving the practice of church to the liturgists, and many liturgists are happy to focus on the practice of church leaving the theory to the ecclesiologists. This thesis has also attempted to begin a conversation aimed at bridging this gap by arguing that the Church is an indissoluble union of people and theology and we must take into account both when we approach ecclesiology and liturgy.

A good example of this union can be seen in the work of liturgical theologian Gordon Lathrop. Lathrop’s ecclesiological premise is that the Church is a “community of Christians. . . . That is, the church will be understood primarily as assembly. Church will be seen as a gathering to do those central things that identity them as Christian.”

Lathrop’s point is that people cannot be divorced from the ecclesiological question and debate. While theological systems are necessary to understand ecclesiality, they alone are insufficient. “The absence of people in [many popular ecclesiologies] – or the presence of people only as an assumption or implication – makes these [ecclesiologies] very difficult to square with the New Testament common place that church is a society, an assembly of human beings,” who, we may add, are known from their communal participation in God’s vision of shalom. Lathrop turns to liturgy to avoid such a pitfall. Using liturgy as the focal point of ecclesiology, he is able to bring together people and theology thereby emphasizing praxis. Lathrop’s liturgical ecclesiology sees Church constituted through the

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334 Lathrop, Holy People, 5.
335 Ibid., 2.
practices of those central things, thus bridging the gap between theory and practice by recognizing that the Christian faith is praxis-based.

A Participatory Ecclesiology attempts to follow in the same vein by putting forth participation as the distinguishing ecclesial characteristic, a participation rooted in praxis. An ecclesiology that integrates theology and people lessens the risk of it being theoretically dense or theologically void and lets us approach our discussions of ecclesiology recognizing and embracing both sides of the ecclesial coin. Such an approach allows us to conceptualize Church in a far more dynamic fashion in that it allows practices and imagery to develop organically thereby responding to the contextual expressions and needs.

This can be seen, for example, in the case of the African Church. In the last few decades many African liturgies and ecclesiologies have begun to be shaped by their cultural context rather than the Eurocentric liturgical practices and ecclesiologies passed on to them by western missionaries. This accommodation and contextualization of the African Church, as witnessed in the work of Sanneh and Jenkins, is responsible for the rapid growth and flourishing of a truly African Church. Such would not be possible without a praxis-based approach to theology. Bishop Desmond Tutu’s *African Prayer Book* provides another example. As he states: “The African worldview rejects the popular

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336 Accommodation: “... people deciding on the essential elements which distinguish the Christian faith from other systems of belief and adapting or adjusting these through the use of language, symbols and illustrations to the recipients of another culture.”(Kirk, *What is Mission*, 89). While this method has been used on behalf of the missionary, I apply it here on behalf of the indigenous church. Contextualization: “recognizes the reciprocal influence of culture and socio-economic life. In relating the Gospel to culture, therefore, it tends to take a more critical (or prophetic) stance towards culture” (91). In other words, in contextualization there is a dialogue between belief and practice, altering articulation and practice based on the culture and socio-economic life. See: Sanneh, *Whose Christianity*, 15ff; Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
dichotomies between the sacred and the secular, the material and the spiritual.”337 Such spirituality inevitably affects liturgy and ecclesiology as it contextualizes the images, language, expressions and focus used to understand the Narrative. This traditional African prayer from Zaire is representative:

O thou Chief of Chiefs, we kneel before thee in obedience and adoration. Like the bird in the branches, we praise thy heavenly glory. Like the village sharpening stone, thou art always available and never exhausted. Remove, we pray thee, our sins that hide thy face. Thou knowest that we are poor and unlearned; that we often work when hungry. Send rain in due season for our gardens that our food may not fail. Protest us from the cold and dangers by night. Help us keep in health that we may rejoice in strength. May our village be filled with children. Emancipate us from the fear of the fetish and the witch doctor and from all manner of superstitions. . . . All this we ask in the name of Jesus Christ.338

We would do well in our context to take into account the benefits of accommodation and contextualization thereby recognizing ecclesiology and liturgy as a dynamic unit. As Hoon suggests, looking at this incarnationally allows us to see the importance of this relationship.339 Incarnation is linked to sacramentality, for the Church is called to be Christ in the world; if the Church is to be the sacramental presence of Christ in the world then how it is to be so is of the utmost importance to ecclesiology. Just as the Word originally came to the world in the midst of second-temple Judaism, the Church is now the embodied Word in the midst of postmodernity. Our ecclesiological paradigms need to be in conversation with this incarnational imperative: the Church is people because God was a person and is now revealed through the Church. With this incarnational principle in mind,

338 Ibid., 8.
we may say that through the congregation’s action, *ie: through the participation of the Church in God’s world,* ‘the mystery’ of Christ takes place. Or again, through the congregation’s action a miracle occurs whereby past, present and future time is transcended and what we can do no better than to speak of as ‘eternity’ becomes eschatologically present. In a word: through the action of ordinary, weak, sinful, flesh-and-blood people, nothing less than the action of the incarnation takes place.\footnote{Ibid., 241.}

Without this incarnational and ontological principle the Church has no existence.

Therefore, ecclesiology necessitates the acknowledgement of people and liturgy necessitates acknowledgement that something greater than ourselves is taking place within Church and worship.

This functions as call to liturgists and theologians, especially those within ecclesiology, to come together and share their experiences and work; each field mutually supports and informs the other. The result can help bring a refreshing and reviving understanding of Christianity to a world struggling to remember what it means to be Church and begin to offer an understanding of the Christian Narrative that is neither intellectually impenetrable, spiritually vacuous or socially moot. This is not a job left solely to preachers, liturgists and worship leaders but to the entire Church – the academics and practitioners – for that is what the Church does. The Church brings God’s eschatological truths to the world by embodying it for all to see. For that to happen we must recognize that what Church is and how Church is of the utmost importance and turn to ecclesiologists and liturgists to come together for the sake of the sacramentality.

There is, of course, much to say about how the Eucharist informs the Church of its identity and purpose, about the nature of the Eucharist, and of the methodological relationship between liturgists and ecclesiologists. The ‘so what?’ of participatory ecclesiology is that it calls our attention to some important questions about what we do as
Church and how that transforms us into the kind of people we are called to be. These three questions are meant to add to the overall question this thesis has been asking: how can the Eucharist function to draw out that sense of sacramentality and aid in our loss of ecclesial identity and purpose.
CONCLUSION

Much of the contemporary Church is experiencing, in some form or another, a loss of identity and purpose brought on by an over-indulgence with postmodern ideals. The result has been ecclesial amnesia, the loss of our ecclesial identity and purpose, something we can overcome through engagement with the Christian Narrative. This thesis has attempted to address this amnesia by putting forth a participatory ecclesiology rooted in the liturgical practice of the Eucharist. Such an ecclesiology draws the Church back into its identity and purpose as the New Humanity, the sacramental community of God’s future world. Within the Eucharist the Church can hear who it is and of what it is a part, thereby finding the nourishment and desire to be sacramental through embodying the ecclesial marks of the one, missional and holy Church. Theological interpretation of the Narrative and Eucharist aside, this thesis calls attention to be given to the importance of our ecclesial identity and the means by which we go about maintaining and sustaining it. Church, regardless of our theological disposition, is not something we arbitrarily are or automatically do; the moment it becomes that is the moment we cease to be ‘Church.’ Church, rather, is perichoretic participation in God’s restoration of the cosmos. The role the Church plays in stewarding in the beautiful and redemptive eschatological telos of God demands that we do not treat Church lightly, with indifference, self-assurance, certitude or disinterest, but with commitment, humility and passion. It is when we fully engage in our identity and purpose as followers of Christ that we experience, as John put it, eternal life (17:3) – life as it was meant to be from the beginning; life full of love, justice, compassion and peace. Sacramentality arises from such lives; and it is through
the Church’s faithful participation in the Eucharist that we may continue to embody these characteristics, inviting the world to experience the fullness of life found in Jesus Christ.
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