

THE EUCHARIST – REAL PRESENCE

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Summary:

This paper surveys the literature in support of the idea of the “real presence” of Christ in the Eucharist. Included is related discussion from ancient church fathers and some key thinkers in the Orthodox tradition. The sense of mystery in this central church rite is strongly supported.

Length: 15 pages

The employment of symbols and sacred acts in religious worship is as old as civilization itself. Within the history of Christianity there is no exception to this statement. While within the branches of the faith there is much variety of opinion regarding the use and meaning of symbolism and sacred acts, the fact that all use them to a certain extent is commonly understood. The two principle sacred acts of Christianity are in the rites of baptism and the ‘Eucharist’ or communion. It is on the sacrament of communion that this paper will focus. This sacred act, meant by Christ to be a unifying celebration of His finished work within the context of community, has regrettably been a major theological battleground throughout church history and continues to be to this day. This paper is not a theological overview of the sacrament but an attempt to understand the act from the perspective of the very early church as evidenced from the writings of the Fathers. The argument put forth is that much of historical and contemporary evangelicalism has undermined the profound significance and meaning of the Eucharist by accepting the post-Reformation view that it is primarily an act of memorial symbolism. This is not consistent with the understanding of the earliest church and Fathers who viewed it a central act of worship that was celebrated weekly, with the real presence of Christ mysteriously in the elements. The paper will consider the important historical developments contributing to this theological change and then look at some of the implications and applications of the ancient views on our post-modern world.

“We need the Word,” said Augustine, “but we also need invisible words.” Symbols and sacred acts can be powerful communicators of truth and reality. “The religious symbol points beyond itself to reality, participating in its power, and makes intelligible its meaning.”¹ It is a means of knowledge of that which cannot be known otherwise, for knowledge here depends on participation - a living encounter with the reality of which the symbol is. It is in the nature of the symbol that it reveals and communicates the ‘other’ as precisely the ‘other’.² Signs and symbols

¹ Vernon Kooy, quoted in Dale B.H. Dirksen course notes - CM819, 6.

² Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World* (Crestwood, N.Y: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1973), 141.

also point to the mysterious quality in the meeting place of the physical and the spiritual.³ As such, they can be communicators and bearers of the transcendent revealing to us the mysteries of the unknown and providing points of contact between the material and the immaterial. Sign and symbol are therefore natural to the world since everything immaterial - values, purpose, ideas and spirit - must be mediated and known through material, physical and social historic means.⁴ Symbols, however, are not revered in and of themselves, but in their association with God and sacred things they can offer stimulation of the senses that moves the mind to seek and find God.⁵

The secularization and diffusion of symbolic meaning coincided with the rise of science and material rationalism. The concept of the symbol was torn away and made distinct from the reality it was originally thought to participate in. The symbol now no longer mysteriously participated in the reality, it only represented it. The Fathers and the whole early tradition, however, did not know the distinction or opposition between the terms reality and symbolism, for symbolism was an essential element of the sacrament. Symbolism “is not only not opposed to ‘real’, but embodies it as its very expression and mode of manifestation.”⁶ For the Fathers, the symbol was understood not only as a means to perceive reality, as a cognitive event, but also as a means to participate in that very reality.⁷ Paul Bradshaw concurs with this view in that while the early Christian Fathers referred to the elements as signs, types, forms or symbols of bread and wine, “in the ancient world a sign or symbol was not thought of as being something quite different from the reality it represented, but on the contrary was understood as participating in some way in the reality itself.”⁸

The biblical witness of communion is found primarily in the gospel accounts and in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians. Matthew, Mark and Luke all recount Jesus’s words as “This is

³ Eleanor Kreider, *Communion Shapes Character* (Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1997), 117.

⁴ Norman W. Pittenger, *Sacraments, Signs and Symbols: With Essays on Related Topics* (Chicago, IL: Wilcox and Follett Co., 1949), 76.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁶ Schmemmann, 139.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Paul Bradshaw, *Early Christian Worship* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 59.

my body” and “This is my blood” as He instituted the rite at the Passover meal. Paul, as well, reiterates these words in his instructions in 1 Corinthians 11 and John (6: 51-58) recalls an encounter that Jesus had with the Jews in which He states that only those who eat His flesh and drink His blood will abide in Him and have eternal life. The Jews apparently did not spiritualize Christ’s words as they were quite repulsed at the idea, especially in light of the specific blood laws of the Torah. The words of Jesus seem exaggerated if not understood in some kind of a literal sense. Likewise, in 1 Corinthians 10: 14-22, Paul is arguing that the Eucharist (thanksgiving) is in fact a participation in the body and blood of Christ and that therefore consuming of the sacrifices offered to idols is a participation in the cup and table of demons. The word participation is from the Greek word *koinonia* which means fellowship, close association or commonality. It has the connotation of intimate connection. Although these passages of scripture have been analyzed and scrutinized for centuries to build support for every possible position regarding the ‘real presence’ of Christ, they do offer a necessary foundation for the purposes of this thesis.

Rather than scripture alone, then, this paper attempts to argue its position from the perspective and tradition of the early church. It is operating under the assumption that those who lived closest to the time immediately after Jesus instituted the sacrament, some of whom were even contemporaries of the apostles, would possess the clearest viewpoint of the original intentions and understandings of the sacred act.

When Jesus instituted the rite of bread and wine, He was participating in the Passover meal with His disciples. By this means He was indicating a continuity between the Passover and the Supper. He was about to become the perfect Passover sacrifice for all time and the meaning of the Passover would change from a re-enactment of God’s saving acts in the Exodus to a re-enactment ‘Eucharist’ of God’s saving acts through the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is understandable then that the earliest celebrations of the Eucharist were also held in conjunction with a meal - called the ‘agape’ feast. Shortly after Pentecost, Acts 2 describes the fellowship of the believers as continually breaking bread (communion) and eating together in one another’s

homes. In 1 Corinthians it is indiscretions associated with the agape meal, which included the Eucharist, that Paul is chastising. It is evident from these passages alone that the Eucharist was a central part of most Christian meetings and definitely a part of the Sunday gathering.

The very early Didache (dated around 70-90) also seems to indicate a meal associated with the Eucharist. The bread and wine were offered first, the meal eaten together and then, “After you have taken your fill of food,” thanks was given in a formal prayer. The Didache also clearly states the weekly observance of the Eucharist; “On the Lord’s own day, assemble in common to break bread and offer thanks.” It also suggests the ‘presence’ of Christ in the elements; “but to us (believers) Thou hast vouchsafed spiritual food and drink and eternal life through <Jesus>, thy servant.”

Around the turn of the century the ritual of the Eucharist became attached to a ceremony of lections and prayers which occurred usually just before dawn. The agape feast and Eucharist had been an evening event as was the Lord’s Supper, but was beginning to be separated for a few possible reasons. First, many of the new converts to Christianity were slaves who may have found it difficult to attend an evening meeting; second, mounting persecution and civil restrictions against meetings could have forced the change; and finally, differences in the Jewish and Gentile clocks may have influenced the decision to move to a morning service.⁹ For whatever reason(s) the Eucharist became a part of more formal setting and ceremony.

It is the words and apparent understanding of the patristic testimony that offers the clearest perspective of the ancient Eucharist. The early Fathers were the church leaders of the first three centuries after Christ. Quotes from their writings regarding the Eucharist follow:

- Ignatius - (martyred 115; contemporary of Apostles). Letter to the Symrnaeans: “They hold aloof from the Eucharist and from the services of prayer because they refuse to admit that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Saviour Jesus Christ.¹⁰ * “Therefore be eager for more frequent

⁹ Cyril C. Richardson, ed. *Early Christian Fathers* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1953), 23.

¹⁰ Ibid., 114.

gatherings of thanksgiving (Eucharist) to God and for His glory.”¹¹ * “Take great care to keep one Eucharist. For there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ and one cup to unite us by His blood.”¹²

- Justin Martyr - (martyred 165) “We do not receive these gifts as ordinary food or ordinary drink.”¹³ * “ In the same way the food over which thanksgiving has been offered through the word of prayer which we have from Him - the food by which our blood and flesh are nourished through its transformation - is, we are taught, the flesh and blood of Jesus who was made flesh.”¹⁴
- Irenaeus - (130-200) “ We offer to Him what is His own, suitably proclaiming the unity of flesh and spirit. For as bread, which comes from the earth, receives the invocation of God, and then it is no longer common bread, but Eucharist, consisting of two things, an earthly and a heavenly; so our bodies, after partaking the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, having the hope of eternal resurrection.”¹⁵ * “Whenever then the cup that man mixes and the bread that man makes receives the word of God, the Eucharist becomes the body of Christ and by these elements the substance of our flesh receives nourishment and sustenance.”¹⁶
- Tertullian - “Moreover, His body is acknowledged as being in the bread: ‘This is my body’, that is the symbol of my body.”¹⁷
- Athanasius - “But the food we partake of is the Father’s Word. We have the lintels of our hearts sealed with the blood of the new covenant; and we acknowledge the grace bestowed on us from our Saviour.”¹⁸

Those who became known as the Later Fathers were men primarily from the fourth

11 Henry Bettenson, ed. *The Early Christian Fathers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 55.

12 Ibid., 64.

13 Ibid., 85.

14 Ibid., 86.

15 Bettenson, *The Early Church Fathers*, 132

16 Ibid., 134.

17 Ibid., 204.

18 Ibid., 412

century and some from the fifth. However, the theme continues:

- Cyril of Jerusalem - (315-378) “We become ‘Christ-bearers’, since His body and blood is distributed in the parts of our body.” * “Therefore, think of the bread and wine not as merely that, for they are in fact, according to the Lord’s express statement, the body and blood of Christ. For though sense suggest mere elements, let faith assure you otherwise.”¹⁹
- Hilary of Poitiers - “We are in Him in virtue of His birth in the flesh, and He is in us through the mystery of the sacraments.”²⁰
- Basil of Caesarea - “For we eat His flesh and drink His blood, by becoming partakers of His word and wisdom. For by ‘flesh’ and ‘blood’ He referred to the whole of the mystical dwelling among us.”²¹
- Gregory of Nyssa - “We are right in believing that now also the bread which is consecrated by the Word of God was transmuted into the body of God the Word.” * “Christ Himself is planted in our bodies through the sacrament so we may be deified with Him” (immortality).²²
- John Chrysostom - “What is in the chalice is the same as that which flowed from Christ’s side. What is the bread? Christ’s body.” * “This is my body, he says. The statement transforms the oblation’s.”²³
- Cyril of Alexandria - “We do not receive it as common flesh (God forbid), nor as flesh of a mere man, sanctified and linked with the word in unity of standing, or enjoying a divine indwelling; we receive it as truly life-giving, as the flesh that belongs to the Word Himself.”²⁴
- Augustine - “Christ was once sacrificed in His own person, and yet He is mystically sacrificed for the people.” * “The sacrament of the body of Christ is, in a sense, the body of

¹⁹ Henry Bettenson, *The Later Christian Fathers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 45.

²⁰ Ibid., 57.

²¹ Ibid., 89.

²² Bettenson, *The Later Christian Fathers*, 163.

²³ Ibid., 175.

²⁴ Ibid., 268.

Christ, and the sacrament of Christ's blood is Christ's blood."²⁵

This is but a sampling of the writings of the Fathers on this subject. However, this theme of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist elements runs consistent through virtually the entire corpus researched for this paper.

There are some common ideas that surface in these writings. The first is the concept of mystery. The Eucharist was considered and referred to as the divine mysteries, holy mysteries and even awful mysteries (John Chrysostom). The real presence of Christ's body and blood in the bread and wine is integral to the patristic theology. This could certainly offer an explanation for the early charges against Christianity of cannibalism.²⁶ The writings, however, do not necessarily suggest that the elements change into the material body and blood of Christ. The bread and wine are still what they appear to be, but through supernatural transformation the Holy Spirit transmutes the actual body and blood of Jesus in and through the elements; they were no longer considered common food or drink. Of course this is unexplainable, yet the Fathers held it to be true and a blessed mystery, accepted by faith. Because they have been offered to God, they are no longer ordinary bread and wine. They proclaim the saving power of Christ, so when received, the partaker mysteriously receives the saving grace that comes from the one-time sacrifice of Christ.²⁷ This concept of receiving grace, spiritual nourishment and sustenance, and even immortality from the Eucharist was also inherent in the Father's understanding of Christ's presence.

Consistent with the view of Christ's presence in the bread and wine was the admonishment for great care in handling the elements. Tertullian states: "We are concerned to prevent any of our wine or bread being dropped to the ground."²⁸ In the *Apostolic Tradition*, Hippolytus writes, "no unbaptized person, mouse, or other animal may taste the elements. None should fall or be lost. It is the body of Christ for those who believe and is thought highly of."

²⁵ Ibid., 245.

²⁶ Richardson, 346.

²⁷ Robert Webber, *Worship Old and New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 134.

²⁸ Bettenson, *The Early Christian Fathers*, 204.

Since the wine was the blood ‘antetype’ of Christ, it must not be spilled.²⁹ This mystical view of the sacrament and the elements also led to the protocol of fasting before receiving the Eucharist, common in Orthodoxy today.

Another idea apparent in the patristic writings was that the sacraments were an extension of the Incarnation. As the second person of the Trinity took on flesh and materiality, thereby redeeming it, so the material elements could become channels of the divine. Sacrament, then, recalls and presents the Incarnation itself because it restores to nature its true function of being full of God. “Nature is the God-bearer.”³⁰ In fact, for the western church, the sacraments were considered the only material substances which could be agents of the divine, whereas the eastern church held a much broader view of the divine-bearing potential of creation including, of course, the image. The churches were also divided on the means of consecration. The western church believed the elements became Christ-bearing through the words of institution, while the east held that it was through the ‘epiclesis’, a prayer of invocation for the Holy Spirit to descend on the bread and wine.

The Eucharist always also included the notion of remembrance for the sacrifice offered by Jesus. Its connection with the Passover and the very words of Christ made sacrifice and remembrance integral themes. The act of communion was understood as the bloodless substitute of animal sacrifice for the new covenant. The elements, as fruit of the earth, were also seen as a sacrifice offered by the assembly up to God.

As the church moved toward the Middle Ages, however, problems started to surface. There first appeared a sort of cultic awe and fear of the elements themselves.³¹ The roots of this idea are already apparent in the early writings of Cyril of Jerusalem. The elements were not only “to be treated with great reverence when they are consumed but that they are also regarded as objects of power which can be used to confer blessing on a person’s body and protect it against

²⁹ Gregory Dix and Henry Chadwick, ed., *The Treatise of the Apostolic Tradition* (Ridgefield, CT: Morehouse Publishing, 1991), 59.

³⁰ Thomas Howard, *Evangelical Is Not Enough* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1984), 110.

³¹ Bradshaw, 64.

evil and sickness.”³²

By the tenth and eleventh centuries, the doctrine of the Eucharist was fully articulated and eventually crystallized in the doctrine of transubstantiation - the view that the actual flesh and blood of Christ were both equally present in the sacramental matter. It was defended by suggesting that if God was able to implant Christ’s body in the virgin Mary, he must be capable of enjoining it to the blood and wine.³³ The implications of this doctrine were many. As stated above, this view solidified the Eucharist as the repository of supernatural power, its efficacy even unaffected by the character of the celebrant.³⁴ Also, the priest only drank from the cup and the laity were just offered the bread because of the fear that some may be lost or spilled and, it has been suggested, to enhance the power and prestige of the priest.³⁵

Further confusion surrounded the idea of sacrifice. The belief in the real flesh and blood coupled with the aspect of sacrifice proliferated the view that Christ was being re-sacrificed at every Eucharist and consequently included the notion of propitiation. With appeasement came justification and ultimately the emphasis that salvation was being communicated through the elements themselves.

It was into this theological milieu that Martin Luther entered history. Luther rejected the excesses and abuse the Catholic Church had brought into the Eucharist, especially that salvation was somehow imbedded in the act. Yet, Luther defended the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist and termed his position as consubstantiation - Christ being present in, through and under the elements. “The heart of the doctrine is this,” he wrote, “that in the bread or with the bread, the body of Christ is really eaten.”³⁶ It was on this very point that Luther and Zwingli divided. Zwingli believed that Christ was present in prayer only and that the elements merely

³² Ibid., 65.

³³ Vivian Green, *A New History of Christianity* (New York, N.Y.: Continuum Pub. Co., 1996), 107.

³⁴ Green, 107.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ K. Tudur Jones, *The Great Reformation* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1985), 142.

signified his body, although his position was not dependent on exegesis.³⁷ He believed that the salvation offered by Christ was spiritual and asserted the real spiritual presence of the Lord was in the heart and mind of the communicant.³⁸ His mental constitution gave him a strong aversion to the mystical and unintelligible and made him lean towards what was clear, definite and practical.³⁹ Zwingli also abolished singing, removed all images, whitewashed the walls and put the sermon in the place of honour. He greatly simplified the communion service as a memorial of Christ's sacrifice.⁴⁰ Later in life, Zwingli softened his position and allowed for a 'spiritual presence' in the Eucharist, but still rejected the corporeal presence of Luther's persuasion.

Calvin, while rejecting Luther's view, also disagreed with Zwingli because he believed that in the sacrament you not only remember Christ, but you also receive Christ. He had also hoped to re-instate communion into the weekly Sunday service in order to reproduce the worship of the early church, but was stymied by the civil authorities.⁴¹ In another attempt to find some middle ground, Melancthon, Luther's friend, offered this posit: "When we are offered the bread and wine in supper, there is truly offered to us the body and bread of Christ, and Christ is truly there, and is powerful in us."⁴²

The Reformation initiated widespread change in thought and practise for Christianity. While Luther was trained in theology, Zwingli and Calvin were schooled in the arts and were influenced by 'Christian humanism'. "Humanist's sought to simplify Christianity, to exalt reason and to emphasize morality rather than ritual."⁴³ The devaluation of mystery and symbol gave way to an intellectualized, internal faith of the heart and mind. This resulted in a shift in focus for the Eucharist, from the ancient church which was centered on the objective work of

³⁷ Glenn T. Miller, *The Modern Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997), 29.

³⁸ Jones, 62.

³⁹ William Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 229.

⁴⁰ Jones, 255.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 256.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 143.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 24.

Christ and the communion being an offering of praise and thanksgiving for that work on our behalf; to Calvin and Zwingli's emphasis on man's faith, self-examination and good works.⁴⁴

The Reformation axiom of "sola Scripture" was interpreted as to make Bible reading and study the locus of spirituality. Exegeting a text promoted concise biblical understanding for personal growth. Does "sola Scripture" cast doubts on the Fathers and reading the Scriptures in light of tradition? Christopher Hall suggests that "sola Scripture" never meant that the only resources the Christian needs to understand God's Word well are the Bible and the Holy Spirit. The idea of the autonomous interpreter can be laid more accurately at the steps of the Enlightenment than the Reformation.⁴⁵

Alexander Schmemmann maintains that post-patristic theology errs by reducing the concept of knowledge to rational or discursive knowledge and separating knowledge from mystery. Although it does not outright reject symbolism (Some branches of Reformers tried), it radically changes the understanding; from A is B (or the very means of participating in B), to A is the cause of B, or A represents B, or A means B.⁴⁶ It is the value of the symbol in that it allows participation into the reality that is otherwise unknowable, the touchpoint between the seen and unseen. "If there are no evocative means provided for the supernatural, it is very likely that the strong awareness of it will fade away, while all the while it is being maintained that the spiritual is being saved from contamination."⁴⁷

And being maintained it was. To many, church history from the second to the sixteenth century is a litany of mistake after mistake. William Cunningham suggests the whole concept of 'real presence' was "a grievous corruption" of the scriptural doctrine of the sacraments which appeared very early in the church. These views, which the Father's called "tremendous mysteries," were a "most injurious influence on the interests of religion" and the corruption was

⁴⁴ Webber, 141.

⁴⁵ Christopher A. Hall, *Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1998), 13.

⁴⁶ Schmemmann, 141.

⁴⁷ Pittenger, 80.

first evident in Justin Martyr.⁴⁸

This tendency to exaggeration and extravagance, to confusion and absurdity, upon the subject of the sacraments, increased continually, in proportion as sound doctrine upon matters of greater importance disappeared and vital religion decayed, until, in the Middle Ages, Christianity came to be looked upon a series of outward ceremonies and ritual observances.⁴⁹

While the excesses which developed in the church up to the Middle Ages are undeniable and have been alluded to, the above sentiment, which initially grew out of reaction to those excesses, gained a solid foothold in most of the evangelical branch of the Protestant church.

The influence of the Enlightenment on post-Reformation evangelical Christianity served only to entrench and to expand the rejection of mystery and the symbol. The centrality of words and texts, linear thinking and rational discourse as the primary means of uncovering understanding and gaining meaning became as significant to the church as it was to science. The analysis and proclamation of the biblical text raised preaching to the central act of worship with all other elements of the service merely preliminaries or postludes. The Eucharist, now commonly called Communion, became relegated to a position of only monthly observance, in an atmosphere of a solemn act of obedience rather than communal celebration. Viewing the elements as memorial symbols only has undermined the rich mystery and much of the supernatural power of the ritual. The monthly observance has stripped it of the centrality it held in the ancient church and gives the modern worshipper the impression of a mere necessary add-on.

In our post-modern culture, there is much potential for the renewal of the Eucharist. With the rejection of modernity, there is once again an openness to the realm of mystery. The Eucharist rite is probably the most powerful act of symbol and mystery in the Christian faith and offers a potent avenue for communicating transcendence and awe to post-moderns. There is a hunger even among young evangelicals for the ancient traditions and for the symbols that

⁴⁸ Cunningham, 232.

⁴⁹ Cunningham, 232-233.

connect them with the immaterial. Our perception of symbol must be expanded. Anthony Ugolnik states that Westerners perceive symbol as an act of intellection - understanding gained through interior reflection, while the East perceives symbol as an act of dramatic perception - understanding gained through communal celebration and participation.⁵⁰ The Father's held that the Eucharist was not something the human mind alone could grasp; it was divine mystery, and through the act one somehow participated in the actual body and blood of Christ.

There is some renewal movement toward restoring the Eucharist as a central act of worship. This is one of three actions Thomas Howard sees as critical for Evangelicals; restoring the ritual as a focal point of worship and celebrating it weekly. The idea that weekly enactment is 'too much' was birthed from modernity and foreign to almost two thousand years of Christianity.⁵¹ While some argue that the Eucharist should be 'the' central act of worship, this paper suggests it should be restored as at least 'a' central act of worship. The dual focus in four-fold worship of Word and Sacrament as central acts offers a holistic progression that communicates truth to the entire person. Webber points out that the two hemispheres of the brain perceive through two different means. The left side of the brain responds analytically and linearly, and is word-oriented. The right side is more creative and intuitive, responding to the symbolic.⁵² Worship, then, through the service of the Word and Sacrament communicates the truth of the gospel to the whole realm of perception and understanding.

One of the simplest ways to renew the communion service is to once again make it an act of participation. Serving the elements to seated communicants only re-enforces the non-participatory, audience mentality, while coming forward (bringing their financial offerings) or going to stations makes it a communal act. Small changes to the elements themselves, like using a loaf of bread rather than wafers or crackers, can provide meaningful symbols of the broken body of Christ and of the body of Christ gathered as a worshipping community. Use of a common

⁵⁰ Anthony Ugolnik, *The Illuminating Icon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1989), 88.

⁵¹ Howard, 153.

⁵² Robert Webber, *Worship is a Verb* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Pub. Co., 1992), 87.

cup likewise provides symbols of communal unity. Use of images via Powerpoint or some other medium and singing songs of response help to engage our minds and emotions.

In the evangelical context, communion has generally been enacted amidst a very sombre, reflective atmosphere. While commemoration of Christ's death and an attitude of repentance are important, there seems to be an element of celebration within the scriptural accounts and the early church writings that has been lost. In every meal, Christ's presence is celebrated through the body and blood of Jesus present in the bread and wine.⁵³ We also celebrate the finished work of Christ, His victory over death and the hope we have as heirs of His new kingdom. Eucharist as 'thanksgiving' makes thankfulness a key aspect of our celebration and a necessary addition to the renewal of the ritual.

To the early church and to the Fathers, the Eucharist was a integral part of every Christian gathering. The significance of it was powerful; generally the unbaptized and visitors were asked to leave during the ritual. The awesome mystery of Christ's presence in the bread and wine was revered and celebrated. As interest in the ancient traditions increases in our post-modern culture, there is being presented to us an opportunity to re-capture the essence of this most sacred act.

⁵³ Webber, *Worship is a Verb*, 77.

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