

2017

A Body Broken for a Broken People: Divorce, Remarriage, and the Eucharist

A McCarthy

The University of Notre Dame Australia, angela.mccarthy@nd.edu.au

Follow this and additional works at: https://researchonline.nd.edu.au/theo_article



This book review in a scholarly journal was originally published as:

McCarthy, A. (2017). A Body Broken for a Broken People: Divorce, Remarriage, and the Eucharist. *AJL: The Australian Journal of Liturgy*, 15 (4).

Original book review in a scholarly journal available here:

<https://www.liturgy.org.au/journal>

This book review in a scholarly journal is posted on ResearchOnline@ND at https://researchonline.nd.edu.au/theo_article/165. For more information, please contact researchonline@nd.edu.au.



Book Review by Angela McCarthy

Francis J MOLONEY. *A Body Broken for a Broken People: Divorce, Remarriage, and the Eucharist*, New York: Paulist Press, 3rd ed., 2015.

The first edition of this book was published in 1990 to view the pastoral problem of divorce and remarriage and access to the sacrament of the Eucharist. Francis Moloney's exegetical lens allows the problem to be viewed in relation to the Good News. The foreword of that edition was written by Xavier Léon-Dufour SJ and used again in the third, most recent edition. Dufour saw Moloney's exegesis of the issue of inclusion in the Eucharist as a courageous work and it still is today. The third edition was prompted by the issue being brought to the fore by Pope Francis' courage to call a Synod of Bishops on the Family in 2014 to examine this pastoral problem. It was published in 2015 before the final Synod as a source of New Testament material to support the argument for the inclusion of those people broken by divorce and remarriage to be healed and included in the celebration and reception of the sacrament of the Eucharist.

In his introduction, Moloney raises the questions relating to this serious pastoral issue. He describes how he considers the *Tradition* to have been distorted and manipulated over time and turned into something that does not echo the Gospel. He describes the Eucharist as 'the celebrated and lived expression of a love so great that we have never been able to match it'.¹ In its initial form as meals with Jesus it was the broken ones who were called to share. After 2000 years we have excluded those who are broken and so we need to question if we are authentically responding to Gospel teaching and example.

The second chapter examines the sections of the First Letter to the Corinthians that have been used to provide exclusions from sharing in the Eucharist (10:14-22 and 11:17-34). Since the letter to the Corinthians is one of the earliest pieces of Christian writing about the meal shared on the night before he died,² it is very important to put it in the historical, literary and theological context in which it was written before declaring it as a basis for excluding people from the Eucharist. Moloney's examination through exegesis does not support such exclusionary determinants. 'The determining context for the correct interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11:27-28 is not the Council of Trent's Decree on the Eucharist (DS 1646), but the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians'.³

Chapter Three is devoted to an exegesis of Mark's gospel, the earliest gospel. Mark seems to be very harsh on the disciples of Jesus and persistently portrays them as people who do not understand what Jesus is doing and who completely desert him, betray him and deny him in the end. The concluding words of the original gospel portray the women who witness the resurrection as broken people: 'So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.' (Mk 16:8) Moloney suggests that this brokenness is to encourage the Markan community because of their own fear and struggle with their own sense of failure. In Mark 8, the second feeding miracle shows the disciples still not able to understand the meaning of the loaves and so the 'disciples of the Markan community – the audience to whom this story is proclaimed – are

¹ Francis. J. Moloney, *A Body Broken for a Broken People: Divorce, Remarriage and the Eucharist* (New York: Paulist Press, 2015), 5.

² *Ibid.*, 7.

³ *Ibid.*, 43.

warned that they should be careful not to repeat such hardness of heart, the blindness of an *exclusive* understanding of the Lord's table'.⁴

In the fourth chapter Moloney examines Matthew's gospel with the claim that it is mostly derived from Mark but given different focus by the change in emphasis on the disciples. The Matthean community is struggling with the post-war era after the destruction of the Temple. 'They *know* that Jesus is the risen Lord among them till the end of the ages, but they are *people of little faith* and still doubt'.⁵ These are also a broken people called to share in the breaking of the bread and then go out to all the world.

Chapter Five examines Luke which has a thematic emphasis on meals but with a different focus. The meals centre round a major theme of journeying. The first half of the gospel accounts for their travels with Jesus to Jerusalem and then afterwards their journey continues but is completely changed. The post resurrection story of Emmaus shows the disciples to be confused and afraid, as are those in Jerusalem behind locked doors. The 'eucharistic presence of the Lord' is set 'in the midst of many of the followers of Jesus who could be described as 'broken': sinners, unfaithful disciples, failing apostles, the physically impure, the marginalized, and Gentiles'.⁶ Yet, these are the twelve apostles who are the future missionaries, who will feed all the nations.

The Fourth Gospel is analysed in Chapter Six. Even though the Eucharistic elements are not present in the same way that they are in the synoptic writings, the story of Jesus' gift of the Eucharistic morsel to Judas 'is central to the overall and larger message of the Johannine Jesus, who summoned the Church to a new quality of love'.⁷

This work gives a thorough understanding of the gift of Eucharist being focussed on the broken people whom Jesus calls and therefore discounts any possible exclusion from the bread broken for all of us in the way that God unreservedly loves us. Moloney has extensive endnotes for each chapter that are very valuable for the wider setting of this work. There is also a substantial bibliography plus NT sources as well as other ancient sources. This is a powerful addition to the scholarly field that links Scripture and doctrine in a pastoral manner and therefore immensely useful for informing the current discussion.

⁴ Ibid., 82.

⁵ Ibid., 107.

⁶ Ibid., 152.

⁷ Ibid., 189.