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6-2018

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Recommended Citation

Johnson, Maxwell E., "From Font to Meal to Service and Unity" (2018). *Institute of Liturgical Studies Occasional Papers*. 130.
https://scholar.valpo.edu/ils_papers/130

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From Font to Meal to Service and Unity

Maxwell E. Johnson

Washed in Water: How Baptism Forms Us
2018 Institute of Liturgical Studies
Valparaiso University
Valparaiso, IN
April 9-11, 2018

In his review of my recent book, *The Church in Act: Lutheran Liturgical Theology in Ecumenical Conversation*,¹ in which I touched only briefly on the question of whether baptism or Eucharist should come first in the sacramental process, Frank Senn wrote:

My experience is that more is needed to engage those who advocate ‘radical hospitality’ than appealing to tradition or even the sacramental economy. It is not just that for these advocates experience trumps tradition. They are intent on doing what they think Jesus would have done. They see Jesus’ feeding of the multitudes as an example of Eucharistic hospitality. They invite everyone to share the bread and wine that God provides ‘whether you are baptized or not.’ They have a view of ‘grace for all’ that tolerates no conditions, no rules, no distinctions. For them the welcome to the table can be the first stage of Christian initiation (evangelism), not only the concluding stage (incorporation). Max Johnson’s big artillery is needed in this debate.²

Whether I have any “big artillery” with which to attack this question is probably debatable but it is a question that needs serious address in a variety of churches today. So, should Eucharistic

¹Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Church in Act: Lutheran Liturgical Theology in Ecumenical Conversation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2015).

² Frank Senn, “Review of Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Church in Act: Lutheran Liturgical Theology in Ecumenical Conversation*,” *Worship* 90 (March, 2016), 176-7.

participation be limited to the baptized or should *all* those in attendance, baptized or not, be regularly welcomed and admitted to share in the Eucharist? Does it really matter which comes first? The House of Bishops of The Episcopal Church voted in 2015 *by only two votes* to continue the traditional practice of Baptism before Eucharist as the norm in their parishes and other institutions.³ The ELCA decided in 2015 as well not to pursue this further.⁴ But conversations in the ELCA, under the terminology of “radical hospitality,” are also continuing, and both communions, including other ELCA partner churches, find a number of adherents not only arguing for significant change in this regard but already putting this into liturgical practice. For example, 70% of the parishes in the Episcopal Diocese of New York, invite all to the table, baptized or not.⁵ Is Eucharistic sharing, then, properly seen as the *culmination* or the *inception* of Christian initiation? This is a big question getting right to the heart of “how Baptism forms us.”

I want to get at this in two distinct but related ways; (1) the rank and dignity of baptism in Lutheran Liturgy; and (2) the relationship of Eucharist to Church. In this I am guided by two ideas so strongly articulated by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, namely, that the Church is “Christ existing as Community,”⁶ and that participating in the Eucharist cannot be separated from the “cost of discipleship.”

I. The Rank and Dignity of Baptism in Lutheran Liturgy

Like the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* of The Episcopal Church, so one of the clear and central goals of contemporary Lutheran worship books has been, as noted in the introduction to *Lutheran Book of Worship*, “to restore to Holy Baptism the liturgical rank and dignity implied by

³ See <http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/ens/2012/07/25/baptism-before-communion-is-still-churchs-norm/>

⁴See Kevin Strickland, “Table and Font: Who is Welcome?” Report to the ELCA Church Council (November 2015).

⁵ Church of St. Mary the Virgin, *The Angelus* 19, 43 (September 17, 2017). Available at: <http://www.stmvirgin.org/the-angelus-our-newsletter/2017/9/15/volume-19-number-43>.

⁶Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 59-60.

Lutheran theology, and to draw out the baptismal motifs in such acts as the confession of sin and the burial of the dead.”⁷ And while such a statement is missing, strangely and unfortunately, from the introduction to the more recent *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, it is clear that a similar emphasis is present by the retention of the wonderful baptismal materials from LBW and by the additional inclusion of several options for the Thanksgiving over the Waters in the baptismal rite and a rite of entrance into the catechumenate (“Welcome to Baptism”), with great implications for the actual restoration of an adult catechumenate, in a manner similar to the Roman Catholic *Rites of Christian Initiation of Adults*. Together with the understanding that the Sunday liturgical gathering will include both proclamation of the Word and sharing of the Meal as the norm for Lutheran practice, modern Lutheran worship books underscore our classic Lutheran baptismal or liturgical ecclesiology from *Confessio Augustana* VII, that the Church is “the assembly of all believers [or ‘saints’] among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel.” Indeed, on an ecumenical level I have often advocated for a baptismal ecclesiology and by that I mean that our ecclesial identity as Church, as the corporate Body of Christ, as dead, buried, and risen in Christ, as clothed in Christ, as born anew and adopted through water and the Spirit, and as signed and sealed by the Holy Spirit for life, witness, and mission in the world is given to us freely in baptism. From baptism the various orders of ministry flow and it’s the baptized that they exist to serve. And back to baptism, to our freely-given baptismal identity, the Eucharist and other rites like corporate and private confession, the funeral rite with its use of the pall, paschal candle, and opening thanksgiving for baptism, lead and direct us. Indeed, while baptism happens personally to individuals, it is never a privatized, individualistic thing, but, rather, it is an ecclesial-corporate event, as that community called Church

⁷ *Lutheran Book of Worship: Minister’s Edition* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1978), 12.

continues to be birthed and formed in the font. And it is an ecumenical, not a denominational or even only a parish event. We are not baptized Lutherans, Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians, or any such denominational creatures. We are baptized into the one Body of Christ, the corporate Christ, into the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, constituting what Dietrich Bonhoeffer once referred to as “Christ existing as community.”⁸ In his study of liturgical ecclesiology, *Holy People*, Gordon Lathrop asked: “If Baptism constitutes the assembly that is the church, ought not the Christians in a given locality enact that truth? Can we not do much of the process of Baptism together? Could a renewed catechumenate be undertaken by many or even all of the Christian assemblies in a given local place? Could we be present at each other’s baptisms? Could we do baptisms on the great feasts and do them side by side? Could we even consider constructing a single font for the local churches in our towns and cities?”⁹ And it was Walter Cardinal Kasper who suggested a few years back even that the time was ripe for the development of an ecumenical catechism among Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Lutherans, Methodists and members of the Reformed churches, based on “an ecumenism of basics that identifies, reinforces and deepens the common foundation.” of faith in Christ and belief in the tenets of the creed.”¹⁰

There is no question but that the “liturgical rank and dignity” of Baptism “implied by Lutheran theology,” is clearly in continuity with the overall theological focus of the New Testament. While New Testament scholar Norman Perrin may have been correct that Jesus' own table companionship with "tax collectors and sinners" was "the aspect of Jesus' ministry which must have been most meaningful to his followers and most offensive to his critics,"¹¹ and that the

⁸Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*

⁹Gordon Lathrop, *Holy People: A Liturgical Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), pp. 146-147.

¹⁰“Cardinal Asks Dialogue Partners If an Ecumenical Catechism Might Work,” *Catholic News Service* (Feb. 8, 2010) at <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/1000540.htm>.

¹¹Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1976), 102.

historical Jesus himself may have required no particular rites of admission to his table, all four of the Gospels (and that's all we have authoritatively(!)), begin the narrative of Christ's adult life at the Jordan with his baptism by John (Mark 1:9-11; Matthew 3:13-17; Luke 3:21-22; and John 1:29-34), a baptism that Christian initiation scholars interpret as reflecting Christian baptisms themselves in the late first century, with an emphasis on baptism as new birth in water and the Spirit, becoming sons and daughters of God in Christ the Son.¹² Is this not done deliberately so that the meal fellowships, those banquet societies, of the early Christians themselves might see their own baptisms as constituting their foundational identity in Christ? Further, the Gospels themselves tend to be just as concerned about baptism as they are about Jesus' meal practices. In Matthew's "Great Commission" (Matthew 28) it is **baptism** and catechesis that is commanded by the risen Christ as the Matthean Church moves into the Gentile world. In Mark **baptism** is Jesus' interpretative word about the cross and the meal in chapter 10:35ff where he asks James and John whether they are able to share his baptism and drink his cup. Baptism is so important in the Gospel of John that Jesus is presented three times as a baptizer himself (John 3:22, 26, and 4:1), and, if not Jesus himself, as John 4:2 says, there can be no question but that the Fourth Gospel certainly associates Jesus and his disciples as part of a baptizing movement akin to that of John the Baptist and his disciples. And on Pentecost in Acts 2, the only major festival that the New Testament ever associates with baptism, Peter did not say, "y'all come to supper," in response to the question, "what shall we do?" but that they should "repent and be baptized," and three thousand, we are told, took him up on his offer that day. It was only *after* their baptism, Luke tells us, that "they devoted themselves to" those liturgical activities of "the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). .And, in spite of the fact that St. Paul had plenty to say about

¹²See my *Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation*, second, revised edition (Collegeville; The Liturgical Press, Pueblo,

Eucharistic malpractice in Corinth, is there any question but that his own theology is baptismal to the core? The classic text illustrating this, of course, is Romans 6:3-11.

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized in Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

For Paul, baptism is really about our participation in the death and burial of Christ in the *hope* of our ultimate resurrection in Him. Clearly for him, the profound reality of baptism means that whatever our life is now after baptism or whatever it will be at the resurrection, it is this death and burial, this participation in *Christ's* crucifixion, death, and burial that marks our present, we might say cruciform, existence in the world as the cross of Christ itself continues to characterize and shape that existence. It is not surprising even that his theological statement on the Eucharist in 1 Corinthians 11, is about death, about the cross, "for as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 cor. 11:26). While this baptismal reality certainly gives rise to those powerful metaphors of conversion to Christ, of constant dying to sin and being raised up to walk in newness of life with and in Christ, of putting to death the "old Adam," of being "clothed with Christ," of being born anew, born from above through water and the Spirit, the washing of regeneration, and of a life of continual and ongoing conversion, repentance, and renewal, one thing is most certainly clear. For St. Paul, the baptized are already "dead" and "buried." Whatever the future holds in Christ, because of baptism, death itself is a reality and experience already *behind* us! And that has profound consequences for how the

baptized face and embrace the post-baptismal life itself in their cruciform journey toward the resurrection. For, because of Baptism, Christians are formed and commissioned to be in the world as Christ was in the world, as one who came to serve others and not be served by others. The ethic of life then flowing from Baptism is nothing other than life lived in Christ, a life which is to be life lived for others!

Is it any wonder Kevin Seasoltz, OSB once said, “if the early Church had used the terminology of “Blessed Sacrament” it would have been in reference to Baptism and not to the Eucharist?” Is there any doubt that for the Gospel writers and for St Paul it is baptism that is foundational to our question about who participates in the Eucharist, since baptism is foundational to life in Christ in the first place? This baptismal cruciform life in the world under the cross of Christ which continues to characterize and shape that life is what the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist – that ongoing proclamation of the Lord’s death -- are to nourish and sustain.

Hence, for those “who are intent on doing what they think Jesus would have done” in their “radical hospitality,” it needs to be said that we don’t really know what Jesus did or would have done and that speculation about whether the historical Jesus invited “everybody” to the table and that this should then serve as a model for contemporary Eucharistic practice is precisely that, *speculation*. In fact, as Gordon Lathrop has noted, we really have no idea at all about the meals of the Christian communities before 1 Corinthians 11.¹³ And while the meal described therein is certainly inclusive of rich and poor (or was supposed to be, at least), it is the rich and poor who, in the wider context of 1 Corinthians, are clearly part of the baptized and, in fact, Paul assumes he is writing to the baptized Christians of Corinth at the beginning of his letter, although 1 Corinthians

¹³Lathrop, *The Four Gospels on Sunday*, 55.

14:22-25 does envision the possibility of “outsiders” and “unbelievers” coming into the assembly.¹⁴

Further, even those several meal settings in the Gospels that might be taken as evidence of Jesus’ own inclusive, egalitarian table fellowship, as Andrew McGowan has demonstrated, show Jesus generally not as *host* but rather as *guest* at the meals of others.¹⁵ And even with regard to those meal contexts where Jesus does assume the role of host (e.g., his feeding miracles and the Emmaus account in Luke 24), Michael Tuck has written that:

[i]n all of these stories, *before we have the feeding*, we have responses to Jesus on the part of those who later become the participants in the meal. The response could be curiosity, as it was among the crowds. It could be repentance.... or it could be divine inspiration and love as it was in the story of the road to Emmaus. It could be any of these reactions and more, but the stories indicate that some sort of reaction or response to the person of Jesus comes before the invitation to the messianic banquet.... Meals also appear prominently in Jesus’ teaching, most notably in the image of the wedding feast.... Again, these stories seem to tell us about a radical invitation offered to those who ordinarily would not be invited. But this invitation is not without some qualifications; we must respond appropriately to the invitation.”¹⁶

And, again it is McGowan who underscores the fact that one must be *very* cautious about basing current sacramental and liturgical practice on a reconstruction of what the historical Jesus may or

¹⁴See Alan Kreider and Eleanor Kreider, 104-5.

¹⁵ Andrew McGowan, “The Meals of Jesus and the Meals of the Church: Eucharistic Origins and Admission to Communion,” in Maxwell E. Johnson and L. Edward Phillips (eds.), *Studia Liturgica Diversa: Essays in Honor of Paul F. Bradshaw* (Portland: The Pastoral Press, 2004), 101-116. See also the helpful essay by Jan Michael Joncas, “Tasting the Kingdom of God: The Meal Ministry of Jesus and Its Implications for Contemporary Worship and Life,” *Worship* 74, 4 (2000), 329-65.

¹⁶ Michael Tuck, “Who is Invited to the Feast? A Critique of the Practice of Communion without Baptism,” *Worship* 86, 6 (2012): 505-27, here at 520-21. [Emphasis added].

may not have done,¹⁷ especially since the very communities which have preserved these meal stories of Jesus do not express that emphasis many want them to today.

The most, then, that we can conclude is that those who reclined at the Christian table as part of the Church's meal or table companionship were baptized Christians and it is those baptized Christian assemblies themselves who are being challenged by the New Testament writers to live out the implications of their baptism and meal sharing by ministry to the poor, both within and outside of the fellowship, including the distribution of food to them. In other words, if the meals of Christians appeared to be inclusive, with Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female (Galatians 4), it is not because the churches were in any social position to sing "all are welcome in the place," but because it was *baptism* that was inclusive and open to all. Hence, whatever issues there may have been about participants in Christian meal sharing in the first century, beyond the presence of rich and poor in the same assembly, such as at Corinth or reflected in the Letters of James and Jude, the only real question here seems to have been whether Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians could share table companionship together, an issue reflected in the Acts of the Apostles, in Galatians, and according to the recent study by Charles Bobertz, in the community of the Gospel of Mark as well.¹⁸ According to Bobertz, in fact, this question is precisely the context behind the accounts of Jesus feeding of the four thousand in Mark 8. Inclusion yes, but Jewish and Gentile Christian inclusion. That is, we are dealing with the baptized, with those who are already disciples, and not with "everyone," even if the implication of this inclusive-baptized, meal sharing community is that the participants are to show hospitality and welcome to those seeking

¹⁷See Andrew McGowan, "The Meals of Jesus and the Meals of the Church: Eucharistic Origins and Admission to Communion," in Maxwell E. Johnson and L. Edward Phillips (eds.), *Studia Liturgica Diversa: Essays in Honor of Paul F. Bradshaw* (Portland: The Pastoral Press, 2004), 101-116.

¹⁸Charles A. Bobertz, *The Gospel of Mark: A Liturgical Reading* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 86-92.

entrance into this inclusive table fellowship through conversion and baptism. In short, it is *not* that meal fellowship leads somehow to baptism but, rather, it is baptism that leads **into** this community, this table, at least, according to what we can know from the writings of the New Testament.

Even before the end of the New Testament period – and contemporaneous with some of the Gospels - this question was already being addressed – and answered - by the late-first century Syrian proto-church order, the *Didache*, or *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, where we read, “do not let anyone eat or drink of your Eucharist except those baptized into the name of the Lord” (Didache 9).¹⁹ Whether this reflects some kind of shift in practice from a more inclusive to exclusive table companionship may be hard to say. But it is surely consistent with what is implied in the New Testament writings as well as with numerous texts from diverse geographical regions in the first four centuries of the Church’s existence. In addition to the *Didache* Lizette Larson-Miller in a recent essay²⁰ draws our attention to the following early Christian sources:

(Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 65): After thus baptizing the one who has believed and given his assent, we escort him to the place where are assembled those whom we call brethren, to offer up sincere prayers in common for ourselves.... At the conclusion of the prayers we greet one another with a kiss. Then, bread and chalice containing wine mixed with water are presented to the one presiding over the brethren.²¹

(Tertullian, *De carne resurrectionis* 8): The flesh is washed that the soul may be made spotless: the flesh is anointed that the soul may be consecrated: the flesh is signed [with

¹⁹E.C. Whitaker and Maxwell E. Johnson (eds.), *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, revised and expanded edition, hereafter, DBL (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, Pueblo, 2003), 2.

²⁰ Lizette Larson-Miller, “Baptismal Ecclesiology without Baptism? Conflicting Trends in Contemporary Sacramental Theology,” in Lizette Larson-Miller and Walter Knowles (eds.), *Drenched in Grace: Essays in Baptismal Ecclesiology Inspired by the Word and Ministry of Louis Weil* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publishers, 2013), 80-92, here at 81-2.

²¹DBL, 3.

the cross] that the soul too may be protected: the flesh is overshadowed by the imposition of the hand that the soul also may be illumined by the Spirit: the flesh feeds on the Body and Blood of Christ so that the soul as well may be filled with God.²²

(John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions* 27): As soon as they come up from those sacred waters all present embrace them, greet them, kiss them, congratulate and rejoice with them, because those who before were slaves and prisoners have all at once become free men and sons who are invited to the royal table. For as soon as they come up from the font, they are led to the awesome table which is laden with all good things. They taste the body and blood of the Lord and become the dwelling place of the Spirit...²³

Indeed, while, according to Senn, neither “tradition or even the sacramental economy” may be convincing for those intent on “radical hospitality” modelled on whatever the historical Jesus may have done, the burden of proof in defense of Eucharist before baptism, in fact, is on those who deny both the tradition and the sacramental economy. While history is never necessarily normative for contemporary practice, there is simply no evidence of which I am aware – biblical, liturgical, doctrinal, or historical – for such a sacramental-liturgical innovation. Even John Wesley’s use of the phrase “converting ordinance” to describe the Eucharist, to which contemporary appeal is sometimes made today for communing everyone, was in Wesley’s time for the purposes of the ongoing conversion of the baptized and as a way of encouraging those who considered themselves “weak in faith” and not fully assured of their salvation to participate in this means of grace to their

²²DBL, 11.

²³ *Stavronikita Series*, 2.27, DBL, 47.

own benefit.²⁴ The Eucharist is the “proclamation of the death of the Lord” (1 Cor. 11:26) but it is not an evangelistic tool to those outside the assembly – although I would never deny that it might function that way in the power of the Spirit – but it is, rather, an in-house proclamation to the assembled liturgical community, reminding that community about what it is this meal signifies and is supposed to signify in their life or it is not the *Lord’s* Supper they are celebrating. That, at least, seems to be Paul’s point in 1 Corinthians.

II. Church and Eucharist

But if neither Scripture, tradition, nor sacramental economy or liturgical *ordo*,²⁵ are convincing, perhaps the question of Eucharist and ecclesiology will be. For, no matter which approach is taken, the traditional or the that of “radical hospitality,” there is no escaping the fact that Eucharist and Church, table companionship and community, Meals and discipleship, Mass, Mission, and Ministry go together. Indeed, the Church as it has been from the beginning is, essentially, a banquet society, composed of the table companions of Jesus, the community of Jesus’ disciples and servants, whose identity is celebrated and continually re-constituted at the Church’s banquet table. But if so, the admissions ticket into this remains baptism; baptism grants access to a seat at the table. Indeed, initiation into Christ and the Church -- at whatever age and at whatever level of preparation and understanding -- is nothing other than initiation into Jesus’ table companionship. Such is certainly the theological understanding behind the introductory statement in the Roman Catholic *Rites of Christian initiation of Adults* that in the Eucharist “the newly baptized reach the culminating point in their Christian initiation.”²⁶ And such is certainly behind

²⁴ See the very helpful discussion of this at <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/table-etiquette-means-and-manners>.

²⁵See “The Importance of the *Ordo* in Sacramental Theology; Communion without Baptism as a Case Study,” *Studia Liturgica* 47 (2017): 151-63.

²⁶*The Rites of the Catholic Church as Revised by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council*, vol. 1 (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, Pueblo, 1990), 147.

the statement of Aidan Kavanagh that: "in baptism the Eucharist begins, and in the Eucharist baptism is sustained. From this premier sacramental union flows all the church's life."²⁷

As Roman Catholics like to remind us Lutherans in ecumenical dialogue, ecclesiology is of major importance, along with the traditional Lutheran emphases on Christology and Soteriology. But all three of these come together in liturgical-sacramental theology. Indeed, the “Body” to be discerned, according to 1 Corinthians 11, is not simply the Eucharistic Body of Christ but the ecclesial Body of Christ, which has been made by Baptism and sustained by Eucharist. As I tried to argue, even by the title of my book, *The Church in Act*, the Church is constituted, called into existence, by the very “acts” it is called and empowered by the Spirit of God to do, that is, to assemble together in order to proclaim the Gospel in its purity and administer the sacraments of the Gospel, according to that Gospel. Roman Catholic liturgical theologians like to quote Jesuit Cardinal Henri du Lubac’s famous statement that “the Church makes the Eucharist and the Eucharist makes the Church,”²⁸ but *Augustana VII* says basically the same thing in its liturgical definition of ecclesiology, although not limited to the Eucharist in its definition of the Church (the church is "the assembly of all believers [or 'saints'] among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel"). So also, the late Lutheran liturgical scholar, S. Anita Stauffer (+ 2007), echoed a parallel approach when she said, “the Church is never more the Church than when it worships.”²⁹ And, along similar lines, Russian Orthodox liturgical theologian, Alexander Schmemmann, once wrote:

²⁷Aidan Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism* (New York: Pueblo, 1978), 122.

²⁸ See Henri du Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, translated by Gemma Simmonds, C.J., with Richard Price and Christopher Stephens, Faith and Reason: Philosophical Enquiries (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

²⁹S. Anita Stauffer, *Re-Examining Baptismal Fonts*, Video Recording (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1991).

Christian worship, by its nature, structure and content, is the revelation and realization by the Church of her own real nature. And this nature is the new life in Christ - union in Christ with God the Holy Spirit, knowledge of the Truth, unity, love, grace, peace, [and] salvation.³⁰

Leitourgia, liturgy or worship, of course, is not all that Church does or enacts in the world, but it is, nevertheless, the very Word and Sacrament *Source* from which the Church -- which is called also to live faithfully in the world in acts of *martyria* (witness), *diakonia* (service), and *didascalía* (teaching) -- finds revealed its God-given identity and self-understanding.

Church and Eucharist go together. While an individual receives communion, the Eucharist is never an individualistic, privatized affair but, like baptism, is corporate, communal, ecclesial. It is the corporate-communal Body of Christ, Christ as community, the *totus Christus*, the whole Christ, Head and Members, in the words of Augustine, that celebrates and receives the Eucharist. But in order to be, celebrate, and receive who and what you are, the Body of Christ, in the Eucharist, you have to be made part of that Body in the first place. Indeed, in order to be fed one must first be born, initiated into that Body through water and the Spirit, in the first place. Listen to the words of Augustine, who underscores how baptism makes one part of that Body:

If you wish to understand the body of Christ, hear the Apostle speaking to the faithful: “Now you are the body and members of Christ” [1 Cor 12:27]. If you then are the body and members of Christ, it is your mystery laid on the table of the Lord, your mystery that you receive. To that which you are you answer “Amen,” and in answering you agree. For you hear the words, “The body of Christ,” and you answer “Amen.” So be a member of the body of Christ, so that the “Amen” may be true. What, then, is the bread? Let us assert nothing of our own here; let us listen to the reiterated teaching of the Apostle, who when he spoke of this Sacrament said, “We who are many are one bread, one body” [1 Cor 10: 17]: understand this and rejoice in unity, truth, goodness, love. “One bread.” What is that one bread? “Many are one body.” Remember that the bread is not made from one grain but from many. When you were exorcised [before baptism], you were, so to speak, ground; when you were baptized, you were, so to speak, sprinkled. When you

³⁰Alexander Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, Second Edition (New York 1975), 23.

received the fire of the Holy Spirit, you were, so to speak, cooked. Be what you see, and receive what you are.... Many grapes hang on the cluster, but the juice of the grapes is gathered together in unity. So also the Lord Christ signified us, wished us to belong to him, consecrated on his table the mystery of our peace and unity (*Sermo 272*).³¹

To become a partaker in the Eucharist, according to Augustine, is to be first ground, sprinkled, and oiled in baptism to become the very Bread of the Eucharist itself. For Augustine baptism is the act of being made into dough and being baked by the Holy Spirit into bread! Hence, baptism is the means of entrance into that Church, into Christ existing as community, which acts in the preaching of the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist.

Whatever *may* have been the case with the meals of the historical Jesus or with participants in early Christian meals *before* the evidence of 1 Corinthians, certainly Mennonite author, the late Alan Kreider, is correct in his description of the following characteristic of liturgy in early Christianity, demonstrating, in fact, that the unbaptized were not part of the Eucharistic assembly:

Christian worship was designed to enable *Christians* to worship God. *It was not designed to attract non-Christians; it was not "seeker-sensitive."* For seekers were not allowed in...Christian worship...assisted in the outreach of the churches indirectly, as a by-product, by shaping the lives and character of individual Christians and their communities so that they would be intriguing.³²

The issue here is closely related to the hard work of establishing the adult catechumenate in our synods and parishes. I have written of this elsewhere, saying that:

The increasing numbers of unbaptized and/or 'unchurched' adults today would seem, just as it did in the context of the fourth and fifth centuries, to call the Church to assist in the evangelization and formation of new Christians with authenticity and integrity... The need for an adult catechumenal process of formation should become increasingly obvious to us. The issue is *not* only liturgy but it is evangelism and formation in Christ and the Church. And the great gift of our classic liturgical tradition is that we don't have to invent a new process for this but can receive it from our ancestors in the faith most gratefully.³³

³¹ ET adapted from Augustine, *Sermon 272* (c. 415), in Darwell Stone, *A History of the Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1909), vol. 1 95–96.

³²Alan Kreider, *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 14. [emphasis added]

³³above, 00-00.

Further, a focus on Baptism as a pre-requisite to Eucharistic participation is hardly exclusionary; *au contraire*, it is radically inclusionary, the most radical hospitality leading to the Eucharistic table that can be imagined, since, according to St Paul, it is *Baptism* that constitutes the Church in which “there is no longer Jew or Greek...slave or free...male or female” (Galatians 3:28). The unbaptized are not excluded at all; but Baptism is the way they are included. The Episcopal liturgical scholar Lizette Larson-Miller in her provocative essay, “Baptismal Ecclesiology without Baptism? Conflicting Trends in Contemporary Sacramental Theology,” strongly underscores this approach saying:

Inclusion in the waters of Baptism and *then* joining in the breaking of bread and pouring of wine into the breaking of body and pouring of blood is *radical* hospitality: to be this for the world, to do this for the world, and to dare to enter the liturgy of the world, having known Christ in the breaking of bread, in order to be broken and poured out for the good of the world. It is *generous* hospitality, catholic, not tribal, to be this for the whole church and for the whole world and to have the wisdom to discern the difference between necessary inculturation and cultural practices antithetical to the gospel. It is *efficacious* hospitality: to invite the non-baptized to come and see, to listen as strangers tell their stories and to weave those stories together with the stories of the gospel, and to show catechumens the way in which the church opens our eyes to the presence of God who is always before us. This is *hospitality*: to return to a graceful and gracious catechumenate, not to react to some of the more insidious cultural assumptions regarding instant gratification. Discipleship, Baptism, Eucharist – in this time between the Ascension and the Parousia – are something we strive toward, but strive with cost, supporting one another as we together move deeper into the mystery of God’s *oikonomia*.³⁴

And, as ELCA liturgical theologian Thomas Schattauer at Wartburg Seminary has recently written:

When we are committed to the baptismal logic of participation at Holy Communion, we are not committed to enforcing a rule about who is qualified to receive but to communicating persuasively the deep relation between welcome to the table and the welcome to baptism. When we understand that participation in the supper involves a person

³⁴Larson-Miller, 91.

in a costly discipleship in the way of Jesus, we are committed to inviting people into the baptismal community that shares that life.³⁵

Consequently, I believe there is no reason at this point and time to go beyond the wise pastoral counsel offered in the ELCA's statement, *The Use of the Means of Grace*:

When an unbaptized person comes to the table seeking Christ's presence and is inadvertently communed, neither that person nor the ministers of Communion need be ashamed. Rather, Christ's gift of love and mercy to all is praised. That person is invited to learn the faith of the Church, be baptized, and thereafter faithfully receive Holy Communion.³⁶

III. Conclusion

So where does all this leave us? If the current conversation in the ELCA, and elsewhere, on the relationship between Baptism and Eucharist may help us in articulating more clearly our baptismal theology as the *inception* of life in Christ and the paschal pattern for baptismal living in the world, it should also raise for us the question of our theological understanding of the Eucharist and what the implications of sharing in the Eucharist are. For, if sharing in the Eucharist implies as Schattaer says above, involving "a person in a costly discipleship in the way of Jesus." then the question of who participates or not is placed on a different level than a position of "radical hospitality" at the altar might imply. Please understand. Exclusion of the unbaptized from the Eucharist is not to protect the Eucharist from some kind of profanation. The Eucharist *is* what it *is*, to use a modern cliché. Rather, exclusion of the unbaptized from Eucharistic participation is out of pastoral care and concern for the unbaptized themselves and to keep them from making a public statement or commitment about faith in Jesus Christ and walking in the way of the cross by receiving Him in Holy Communion that they may be neither prepared nor ready to make! If,

³⁵ Thomas Schattaer, "Table and font: Who is welcome? An invitation to join the conversation about Baptism and Communion," available at: http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Schattaer_Thomas.pdf

³⁶ Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament* (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1997), Application 37G.

however, they have been catechized, are prepared and ready to make such a faith commitment, then why would they not be seeking Baptism? And the meaning of “costly discipleship” is best learned by what we might call apprenticeship in the community of faith through its formation process known as the catechumenate leading to baptism. If Christ exists as community and baptism is conceived of in Romans 6 manner of our being plunged into the death of Christ, then baptism is an invitation to commit to this community and the cruciform life style of Messiah—that is, identifying with the lowly, the poor, the stranger, the immigrant, the abused, the discriminated against; in other words, solidarity with those who feel they do not belong. To enter the catechumenate is to commit to this cruciform manner of life which can be costly. One lives this cruciform existence in acts of sacrificial love in marriage, family, work, friends, etc. And it is to this baptismal dying and rising we re-commit ourselves to every time we say “Amen” at communion, or, in the words of Augustine, when we say “yes to who we are,” the Body of Christ, so that we may be what we celebrate and receive.

Listen to what Alexander Schmemmann said many years ago about what he perceived as happening within his own Russian Orthodox tradition:

It suddenly became clear to me that ultimately, deeply, deeply, there is a demonic fight in our Church with the Eucharist—and it is not by chance! Without putting the Eucharist at the very center, the church is a ‘religious phenomenon,’ but not the Church of Christ, the pillar and bulwark of the Truth (1 Timothy 3:15). The whole history of the Church has been marked by pious attempts to reduce the Eucharist, to make it ‘safe,’ to dilute it in piety, to reduce it to fasting and preparation, to tear it away from the church (ecclesiology), from the world (cosmology, history), from the Kingdom (eschatology). And it became clear to me that if I had a vocation, it is here, in the fight for the Eucharist, against this reduction, against the de-churching of the Church—which happened through clericalization on one hand, and through worldliness on the other.³⁷

³⁷ Alexander Schmemmann, *The Journals of Father Alexander Schmemmann, 1973-1983*, trans. Juliana Schmemmann (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2000), 310.

That's what I believe is at stake in all of this for us, the possibility of Eucharistic reductionism; and this needs to be avoided at all costs since it cuts to the heart of our Lutheran confessional stance in the world! That is, in a sense, the challenge facing the ELCA here, and, potentially, in relationship to the ELCA's now several full-communion partners, is not really what comes first, Baptism or Eucharist, at all. Rather, *the* question is what is the meaning of the Eucharist we share as Church and what are the implications of participating in the Eucharist for ongoing life in Christ?

But let me end with another question. Just who are these unbaptized people yearning to share in the Eucharist in our congregations? And how common must this phenomenon be that it is raising the issue of a such a foundational change in our sacramental-liturgical practice? If this is the case, then, what a great problem to have. If we have all these people seeking a place at the Lord's Table then, by all means, what a great opportunity and gift for evangelism and formation in discipleship, called the catechumenate leading to Baptism and Eucharist, we have been given.

But the question of Jesus to James and John remains pertinent to all of us, "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with" (Mark 10:38)? Both baptism and sharing the cup of Christ put us on the way of the cross. The Eucharist is always a costly meal with the Crucified One who lives. Participating in the Eucharist is never safe!