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TO BE THE BODY OF CHRIST: DISCIPLESHIP (SOLIDARITY) AND EUCHARIST

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The word *eucharist* is saturated with meaning: Simultaneously, eucharist evokes the dangerous memory of the audacious Jewish rabbi from Nazareth who dared assert that “unless you eat [my] flesh and drink [my] blood, you have not [eternal] life . . . [for] my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed” (John 6: 53, 54). And eucharist recalls his great and nourishing sacrificial gift of life in the struggle to bring about his Father’s dream of love, mercy, joy, and peace.

Eucharist commemorates the Passover meal that Jesus of Nazareth ate with his friends only hours before he died. Like millions of Jews before him and millions of Jews after him, in this ritual meal, Jesus acknowledged, blessed, and praised the Holy One for those mighty acts by which God liberated, guided, protected, nourished, sustained, and ennobled a people. In his First letter to the Corinthians, Paul recounts the story of this meal: “I received from the Lord what I handed on to you, namely, that the Lord Jesus on the night in which he was betrayed took bread, and after he had given thanks, broke it and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you’ ” (I Cor. 11: 23-24).

The words and gestures of Jesus of Nazareth at that meal and in its bloody aftermath incarnate the etymology of the Greek verb *ευχαριστ ειν* (eu-carist- ein) that refers to the “proper conduct of one who is the object of a gift.” The meaning of eucharist goes well beyond any simplistic attitude of thankfulness and presses with eager yearning for concrete outward evidence of gratitude that indicates the gift is “effective and present.”¹ The sacramental meal of the Christian assembly grows from this understanding of thanksgiving. In this meal, the community of believers acknowledges, blesses, and praises the gratuitous gift of Jesus of Nazareth whose work and very being effect for us the very conditions of the possibility through the Spirit to claim the gift of his body and blood, to stand within the horizon of the *magnalia dei*, to embrace his God as our own, and to seal our pledge to embody Divine love through acts of concrete compassion and solidarity in the here and now—to be the body of Christ.

Pope John Paul II declared October 2004-October 2005 as the year of the Eucharist.² The pope opened the Apostolic Letter that promulgated and explicated the joy of that year with one of the most poignant phrases in the Gospels—“Stay with us Lord” (Luke 24:29). On the Lucan account, late in the afternoon of the day of the resurrection, two men leave Jerusalem for the

¹ Johannes Betz, “Eucharist,” in *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi* Karl Rahner, ed. (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 448.

² John Paul II, “*Mane Nobiscum Domine*,” [http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_2004\(3/21/2005\).](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_2004(3/21/2005).)

seven-mile walk to the town of Emmaus. Their hearts are pained and heavy with grief as they recall the arrest, sham of a trial, brutality and abuse, crucifixion, and death of the rabbi Jesus of Nazareth. These two were followers of ‘the way’ that Jesus taught, but now they are confused and broken in heart and spirit! This Jesus, this one whom they had hoped would liberate the people of Israel was dead (21). But now, an astonishing rumor, perhaps, no more than wish, was circulating: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, along with some other women—all followers of ‘the way’—had gone to the tomb to anoint the rabbi’s body. But, the women found the stone rolled away, the tomb empty, the body gone; further, they insisted that they had seen an angel who announced that the rabbi was alive (24:1-12, 22-25).

Deep in conversation, the two disciples are joined by Jesus himself; and, although they *see* him, they do *not* recognize him (15-17). “What are you talking about?” he asks. The men are incredulous. “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?” Cleophas demands. “What things?” the stranger replies. “Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him” (17-20). The stranger chides them: “O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken of the messiah!” Then, he began to explain the meaning of those terrible events in light of the teaching of *Torah* (the Books of Moses) and *N’viim* (the prophets). So the three of them walk on together to Emmaus, the two disciples listening intently to the stranger’s words.

Reaching the edge of the village, the stranger makes ready to move on. But the men implore him, “Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.” So Jesus went with them and when they sat together at the table, he took bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they *recognized* Jesus, and he vanished from their sight. They were amazed and said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?” Immediately the disciples left the inn and returned to Jerusalem. They found the eleven gathered together with other witnesses to the resurrection and told them of their experience on the road and how Jesus was made known to them at table in the breaking of the bread (25-35).

In this presentation, I explore the relation between discipleship as solidarity and Eucharist. To this end, the Gospel of Luke sets the scriptural parameters, as the story of the disciples on the way to Emmaus and their experience of recognizing Jesus at table in the breaking of bread is narrated only in this Gospel. Written in the final decades of the first century and addressed to a community of mixed social and economic standing, Luke’s narrative has come under critique for its tendency to convey double-messages and its ambiguity toward women and the poor.³ New Testament scholar Sharon Ringe has argued that Luke “pulled his punches:” Luke speaks *about* the poor, but he speaks *to* the rich; he emphasizes *charity*, but

³ See, Barbara E. Reid, *Choosing the Better Part? Women in the Gospel of Luke* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), Turid Karlsen Seim, *The Double Message: Patterns of Gender in Luke-Acts* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), and Clarice J. Martin, “The Acts of the Apostles,” in Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, ed., *Searching the Scriptures, A Feminist Commentary*, vol. 2 (New York: Crossroad, 1994).

seems not to advocate *change* in repressive political and economic arrangements.⁴ We too live in a powerful nation of increasingly deep and wide social and economic disparities and divisions. This gospel raises as many questions for us as it seeks to answer: How are *we* to live if we call ourselves disciples of Jesus? Do we speak truth to power or pull *our* punches? What does it mean for us to be the body of Christ?

Yet, perhaps, it is not surprising that in a text prepared for a community marked by great poverty and great affluence the Lucan narrator stresses food and eating. After all, usually the poor are hungry and the rich overfed. Robert Karris remarks that at least one reference to food or feasting can be found in every chapter of the Gospel and that this theme is carried into the Acts of the Apostles.⁵ Jerome Kodell summarizes two overarching food themes that Karris uncovers in the Luke's Gospel: "Jesus as the one in whom God feeds his hungry creation and Jesus as God's messenger of justice who is put to death because of his openness in sharing food and sharing himself with everyone *without* exception."⁶ Marianne Sawicki notes, Luke associates hunger with the condition of the possibility to recognize the Resurrected Lord and to understand the consequences of resurrection life.⁷ For, it is in the breaking of the bread, the feeding of hungry bodies and an even hungrier hearts that the eyes of forlorn disciples are opened and they recognize the crucified and risen Jesus. "*Stay with us Lord.*" With some measure of confidence, we may say that hunger constitutes a condition for the possibility of Christian discipleship.

To live as Jesus' disciple, to live in solidarity means to live as he lived—at the disposal of the cross, exposed, vulnerable, hungry, and open to the wisdom and power and love of God. Lived response to his call requires a commitment to justice and compassionate solidarity as well as surrender to the startling embrace of Divine Love. To live as Jesus' disciple means to sit down and join others at a table where Jesus is host, where he sustains and renews the bonds of our solidarity, where he nourishes and teaches us on 'the way.' I work this out in four sections. The *first* section, "The Way of Jesus," briefly sketches his ministry and the demands he places on those who would follow him. The *second*, "Table and Cross," uncovers tensions in the challenge and summons that Jesus issued—"take up your cross and follow me"—to the women and men who desire to follow 'the way' he taught and adverts to the generative, if paradoxical, *logos* of the cross whose shadow falls across the Eucharistic table.⁸ The *third* uncovers the global material context in which we seek to live his way, to follow him in solidarity, *to be the body of Christ*. From this analysis, then, we may be in the position to say something in the *fourth* section about solidarity, about discipleship—about what it might mean in our present context *to be the body of Christ*.

⁴ Sharon H. Ringe, "Luke's Gospel: 'Good News to the Poor' for the Non-Poor," in Wes Howard-Brook and Sharon H. Ringe, ed., *The New Testament—Introducing the Way of Discipleship* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002), 65.

⁵ Robert Karris, *Luke: Artist and Theologian: Luke's Passion Account as Literature* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 49-51, cited in Jerome Kodell, *The Eucharist in the New Testament* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1988).

⁶ Kodell, *The Eucharist in the New Testament*, 106.

⁷ Marianne Sawicki, *Seeing the Lord: Resurrection and Early Christian Practices* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 90.

⁸ Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence* trans. Patrick Madigan and Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995), 82.

THE WAY OF JESUS

In the Lucan account, the ministry, that is, the teaching, preaching, and healing, through which Jesus of Nazareth met a death on the cross, began in a small synagogue in his hometown. Jesus takes the scroll from the attendant and reads: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4: 18-19, 21; Isaiah 61: 1, 2; 58: 6). The writer portrays the congregation as reacting with pleasure and pride: “And all spoke well of him and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth; and they said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” (4:22). But, then Jesus implies that foreigners—the widow of Zarephath and the Naman the Syrian—also experienced the favor and power of the Lord God Adonai when the people turned away, refused to listen. Pride and appreciation curdle to anger and resentment, provokes violence: “They rose up put him out of the city, and led him to the brow of the hill . . . that they might throw him down headlong” (4: 24-29).

Almost from the outset of the Lucan narrative, Jesus is identified with messianic promise and prophecy. His ministry *signs* the in-breaking of the reign of God: He is sent to those who are wounded and impaired, broken-hearted, and despised; who are afflicted with dis-ability and dis-ease; who are economically and socially impoverished and excluded; who are imprisoned by occupation or disfigurement and, thereby, rendered incapable of ritual purity; who are hungry for bread and belonging. These children, women, and men are without choice, without hope, and without a future. Jesus announces to these ‘least’ the compassion and solidaristic gift of the reign of God. Jesus pledges with his very life and body and blood that God is *for* them and *with* them.

Women—Mary Magdalene, Joanna, the wife of Herod’s steward, Susanna, Mary the mother of James (8: 1-3)—form part of the company of disciples who travels with Jesus to various cities and villages and share in his ministry. Luke’s Jesus does not shy away from talk and debate with women; he heals them, forgives them, and takes them and their experiences seriously. When a woman named Mary sits at his feet *as* a disciple, Jesus affirms her agency over against narrow and constricting roles set for women by culture and society (10: 38-42). Finally, the proclamation of the resurrection itself is entrusted to women; their vivid and fearless remembrance of the words of Jesus grounds their witness (24: 9).

Through his audacious proclamation of the reign of God and his astonishing healing power, Jesus attracts crowds and, eventually, disciples. The men and women who would follow him (8: 2-3) are challenged to sever all ties with the past (5:11), to pray, to fast without ostentation, to practice self-examen (11:1-4; 6: 42), and to allow no familial obligation, no cultural custom, no ritual observance to turn them to another ‘way’ (14:26; 9:57-62; 12: 22-23).

Through word and deed, Jesus taught his disciples to center themselves *in* and on the God whom he knew and loved with all his heart, all his soul, all his strength, and all his mind (10:25-27; 11: 1-13). He enjoined them to love others—particularly, poor, outcast, and despised children, women, and men—concretely and without reservation, to act on behalf of these ‘little ones’ for restoration to God and to community (10:29-37).

The proclamation of the reign of a God “slow to anger, rich in mercy,” (Jonah 4: 2) formed the core of Jesus’ preaching. In parables and sermons, he drew a vivid portrait of life lived under the reign of this God. What would this new life be like? Like the watchfulness of a farmer at harvest, like the consolation of acceptance, like a lavish and festive feast for those who neither can return the honor nor provide a comparable meal, like the joy at rescuing a stray lamb in the parched wilderness, like the relief at recovering lost funds, like the unconditional love of a broken-hearted parent for a wayward child, like the fruitfulness of the mustard seed and the wild capaciousness of its tree, like the power of leaven (8: 4-18, 44-48; 14:12-14; 15: 4-10, 11-16; 13: 18-21). Jesus envisioned life lived under the reign of this God as a realization of truth and love, holiness and grace, justice and peace. Moreover, this God staked the gift of that reign *in us* and *in* present existential reality (17: 21). Finally, Jesus taught his followers to pray that the reign of God might come—and to pray for its coming as God wills it. The disciples are to pray for and to act out—to perform—God’s reign of justice, peace, and plenty which, while not yet realized, is seeded in the here-and-now, that point of change where the old order yields to God’s dream of *all* peoples drawn together around a great table (11:2-4; 14:12-24).

TABLE AND CROSS

Early on in his narrative, Luke sets out the “theme of God’s lavish feeding of the needy.”⁹ The praise song placed in the mouth of Mary of Nazareth celebrates Divine compassion: “[God]has filled the hungry with good things and the rich [are] sent empty away” (1: 53). Mary’s canticle echoes Isaiah’s eschatological depiction of God’s promise to care for children, women, and men who hunger and thirst: “[Listen] everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and whoever has no money, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price” (Is 55:1). “Keep justice and do righteousness,” then God shall bring *all* the peoples of the earth to God’s holy mountain and make them joyful in God’s house (Is 56:1, 7).

Jesus embodies *both* the commands to feed the needy generously, to uphold justice, to love mercy, to do what is right *as well as* God’s promise of salvation. He does this by sitting down at table, sharing food and drink *with everyone without exception*—tax collectors (Levi, 6:29-39 and Zacchaeus 19:1-11), prostitutes (the woman in Simon’s house, 7:36-39), the wealthy and powerful (14:1), the poor, the outcast and despised, lepers, Pharisees, and public sinners. But Jesus’ practice of opening the table, sharing food and drink *with everyone without exception* angered the authorities. Such behavior flaunted religious regulations long-established to protect the ritual integrity and purity of those who ate together. Luke’s Jesus is a living parable of God’s deep desire to feed, to nourish, to draw all creation deep into the divine heart.

Yet, to borrow a word from Howard Thurman and Johann Baptist Metz, the ministry of Jesus was a “dangerous” ministry—*Jesus was dangerous*.¹⁰ The *praxis* of compassionate

⁹ Kodell, *The Eucharist in the New Testament*, 106

¹⁰ See, Howard Thurman, *Deep River and The Negro Spiritual Speaks of Life and Death* (Indiana: Friends Untied Press, 1975): “It was dangerous to let the slave understand that the life and teachings of Jesus meant freedom for the captive and release for those held in economic, social, and political bondage” (16). Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, trans. J. Matthew Ashley (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2007). Metz uses the term “dangerous” to rouse us from our (bourgeois) social amnesia that allows us to erase and forget the victims of history.

solidarity that Jesus inaugurated on behalf of the reign of God disrupted social customs, religious practices, and conventions of authority and power. The table is set and *all* are welcome, and those who would be disciples are to sit down with one another as friends. The ‘way’ of discipleship is the ‘way’ Jesus is, and the way Jesus walks leads to and through the cross. “Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:27).

By his death on the cross, Jesus incarnated the solidarity of God with abject and despised human persons. The disciples who heard and responded to his words and the deeds of his life came, even, if haltingly, gradually, fitfully, to dedicate their lives and their living to the concerns, commitments, and compassion of the God of Jesus. In this way, they placed their lives at the disposal of the cross.

The cross rises between the meal that Jesus shares with his disciples before he dies and the bit of broiled fish that he eats with them in Jerusalem (24: 41-43). At the Passover Meal, Jesus declares to his friends that he shall not eat or drink again until the reign of God comes (22: 16-18). He promises them that when that reign does come, they shall sit with him at his table in places set specially for them, eating and drinking with joy (22: 28-30). Thus, to be Jesus’ disciple means to walk ‘the way’ Jesus is, to take up our cross, to eat with and feed outcast and despised women and men, to share with them eucharistic food (his body and blood)—the only food that lasts.

THE GLOBAL MATERIAL CONTEXT

In launching the First World Day of the Poor (19 November 2017), Pope Francis wrote: “If we truly wish to encounter Christ, we have to touch his body in the suffering bodies of the poor, as a response to the sacramental communion bestowed in the Eucharist. The Body of Christ, broken in the sacred liturgy, can be seen, through charity and sharing, in the faces and persons of the most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters.”¹¹

Each day around the world armed conflict, violence, and coerced conscription drive thousands of children, women, and men from their homes, villages, and towns. Research conducted by the United Nations and the World Bank indicate that in 2014, fifty-one percent of all refugees were children, and by the end of 2015, violent conflicts “related to group-based grievances arising from inequality, exclusion, and feelings of injustice”¹² forced twenty-million persons to seek safety outside their country or region of birth.¹³ Poverty remains the scourge of our world and, along with war, the chief cause of hunger. By the year 2030 roughly forty-six percent of the world’s poor will live in fragile and conflict-affected situations stemming from their marginalization as different and, therefore, ‘other.’¹⁴

¹¹ Pope Francis, “First World Day of the Poor,” #3 (13 June 2017) http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/poveri/documents/papa-francesco_20170613_messaggio-i-giornatamondiale-poveri-2017.html

¹² United Nations and World Bank, *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2018), 109; <http://ida.worldbank.org/theme/conflict-and-fragility>;

¹³As a result of such forced displacement, by the end of that same year (2015), “65 million refugees were internally displaced, with 95% living in developing countries and over half of them displaced for more than four years” <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/fragilityconflictviolence/overview>

¹⁴ <http://ida.worldbank.org/theme/conflict-and-fragility>

One quarter of the world's population lives with less than one dollar a day, while half live with less than two dollars a day. In 1960, the poorest 20% of the world's population received 2.3% of global income, in 2008 they received 1.1%. The 20% of the world's population that resides in the affluent Northern hemisphere receives 60% of the world's income, engages in 80% of the world's trade, four-fifths of the world's health spending, and consumes 86% of the world's goods. This group consumes 45% of the world's meat and fish, 58% of its energy, 84% of all paper, 85% of all water, and own 87% of all the world's vehicles.¹⁵

The persistence and virulent spread of HIV and AIDS along with increasing incidences of polio and tuberculosis have reawakened old plagues in new places. In Russian and U.S. prisons, more and more women and men fall prey to multidrug-resistant tuberculosis.¹⁶

Four decades ago, Gustavo Gutiérrez declared that the main challenge to liberation theology, “comes not from the sceptic but from the non-person or the non-human . . . the human being who isn't recognized as such by the prevailing social order.”¹⁷ And Achille Mbembe puts it this way:

From the standpoint of colonialism, the colonized does not truly exist, as a person or as a subject. . . . The colonized does not exist as a self; the colonized *is*, but in the same way as a rock *is*—that is, as nothing more. . . . The colonized belongs to the *universe of immediate things*—useful things when needed, things that can be molded and are mortal, futile and superfluous things, if need be.¹⁸

We in the United States can no longer evade our responsibility for our own historical, cultural, and social (i.e., political, economic, technological) problems: Consider our uncritical surrender to the neoliberal market's vulgarization of individuality as license, our exploitation of poor and working people along with processes of dis-employment, market manipulation, and commercialization of desire,¹⁹ our criminalization of poverty and contempt for the working

¹⁵ This passage relies on Petrella, *Beyond Liberation Theology*, Loc 705-743, Kindle.

¹⁶ See Jacquineau Azetsop, ed. *HIV & AIDS in Africa: Christian Reflection, Public Health, Social Transformation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2016), Paul Farmer, *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 131.

¹⁷ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Teología Desde del Reverso de la Historia*, Lima: Ed. CEP, 1977 cited in Petrella, *Beyond Liberation Theology*, Loc 777 of 5216, Kindle.

¹⁸ Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 187 (author's italics).

¹⁹ See Steven High and David W. Lewis, *Corporate Wasteland: The Landscape and Memory of Deindustrialization* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 2007), Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Cambridge, MA/ London: MIT Press 2015), Jung Mo Sung, *Reclaiming Liberation Theology: Desire, Market, Religion* (London: SCM Press, 2007).

poor,²⁰ our arrogant and casual misogyny that has given rise to ‘rape culture,’²¹ our ineffective response to homelessness and disdain for homeless women and men,²² our dispossession and disregard of indigenous peoples,²³ our obliviousness to environmental racism,²⁴ our condescension to differently-abled women and men,²⁵ the privatization of our prisons along with massive rates of incarceration among black and brown men and youth and women,²⁶ our dismissive attitudes toward the deaths of black and brown youth and women and men while interacting with police or their agents,²⁷ our hate crimes against LGBTQI persons,²⁸ our religious chauvinism, our narrowed cultural horizon, our nativism and bigotry toward immigrants,²⁹ and our persistent racial animus.³⁰

²⁰ J. D. Vance, *Hillbilly Elegy: Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis* (New York: HarperCollins, 2016), Sarah Smarsh, *Heartland: A Memoir of Working Hard and Being Broke* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018), Kathryn Edin, *\$2.00 a Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015).

²¹ Linda Alcoff, *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), Kate Harding, *Asking for It: The Alarming Rise of Rape Culture and What We Can Do about It* (Philadelphia: Perseus Press, 2015).

²² Matthew Desmond, *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2016).

²³ Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015).

²⁴ Consider the Flint, Michigan water crisis that began in 2014 when the city switched its water source from the Detroit Water and Sewage Department to the Flint River. Aging pipes (some installed between 1901-1920) and insufficient treatment of the water source resulted in contamination of potable water. Early in the crisis, the General Motors's Assembly plant discontinued using Flint River water because the high levels of chlorine corroded engine parts. Citizens complained of discolored, foul smelling water that caused rashes, fever, sore throats, etc. Two medical studies by Flint's Hurley Medical Center and Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University exposed the dangerous effect of the water usage on children. Scientists agree that climate change is making itself felt through an escalation in the frequency and ferocity of wild fires, floods, hurricanes, and volcanic eruptions that annihilate human populations, destroy animal and plant life, and damage infrastructure. Moreover, consider that

²⁵ Susan Burch and Michael Rembis, ed., *Disability Histories* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014), Eli Clare, *Brilliant Imperfection: Grappling with Cure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

²⁶ See Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010), William J. Stuntz, *The Collapse of American Criminal Justice* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2011), Bryan Stevenson, *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption* (New York: Random House, 2015); David Shapiro, *Banking on Bondage: Private Prisons and Mass Incarceration* (New York: American Civil Liberties Union, 2011), 5, <https://www.aclu.org/banking-bondage-private-prisons-and-mass-incarceration/>

²⁷ Consider these senseless racially-motivated killings—in 1998 James Byrd; in 2012 Trayvon Martin and Rekia Boyd; in 2013 Andy Lopez; in 2014 Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and Tamir Rice; in 2015, Freddie Gray, Jr., Sandra Bland, and in Charleston, South Carolina at Mother Emanuel AME Church: Sharonda Coleman-Singleton, DePayne Middleton Doctor, Cynthia Hurd, Susie Jackson, Ethel Lance, Clementa Pinckney, Tywanza Sanders, Daniel Simmons, and Myra Thompson; in 2016, Alton Sterling and Philando Castile.

²⁸ Recall these senseless homophobically-motivated murders—in 1998 Matthew Shepherd; in 2003 Saskia Gunn, Shani Baraka and Rayshon Holmes; in 2008 Angie Zapata; in 2016 the 49 women and men in Orlando, Florida at the Pulse Night Club including Stanley Almodóvar, Amanda Alvear, Antonia Davon Brown, Luis Daniel Conde, Anthony Laureano Disla, Mercedes Marisol Flores, Eddie Justice, and Christopher Andrew Leinonen.

²⁹ Esther Yu His Lee, “Poll: Americans’ Anti-Immigrant Attitudes Are Fueled by Racism,” *Think Progress*, July 7, 2016, <http://www.thinkprogress.org/poll-americans-anti-immigrant-attitudes-are-fueled-by-racism-30968b83a908/>. For historical studies of nativism, see John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), and Ronald Takaki, *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in 19th Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

³⁰ On February 19, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 authorizing the Secretary of War to identify and secure certain areas of the country as military zones, and, thus, incarcerating Japanese Americans, see Yoshiko Uchida, *Desert Exile: The Uprooting of a Japanese American Family* (Seattle: University

The children, youth, women, and men to whom the above data refer quite literally are deprived of personhood. Because of their embodied difference, they are ostracized from the category of the human—driven from the table of the Lord. Neither their persons nor their needs matter at all in the manner in which the world’s resources are distributed. Our world has become a dumping ground, a “zone of social abandonment”³¹ for the many whom we have made wretched.

DISCIPLESHIP AS SOLIDARITY

St. Augustine reminds us that the Eucharist is “the symbol of what we are.”³² What does it mean *to be the body of Christ*, to reveal in our words and deeds his abiding but hidden presence in our world? Given a social context in which ‘otherness’ shifts constantly to our (another’s) advantage, what is at stake here is the very realization of the body of Christ.³³ Love in act or compassionate solidarity must contest denial and exclusion. Thus, solidarity is the crucial meaning of this realization.³⁴

Solidarity rises in achievement of community. Prerogatives rooted in socially constructed disparities are deconstructed. In this or that here-and-now, we find ourselves striving to realize concretely the fruitful insights of intelligence and rectitude. And, again we find ourselves standing before the table of the Lord, standing before the cross of Jesus of Nazareth—yearning to grasp the enormity of suffering, affliction, and oppression; to apprehend our complicity and collusion in the suffering, affliction, and oppression of others.

Solidarity is a wrenching task: to stand up for justice in the midst of social oppression, injustice and domination; to take up simplicity in the midst of affluence and comfort; to embrace integrity in the midst of collusion and co-optation; to contest the gravitational pull of evil’s power. We need grace for solidarity and for community. We need the *grace of interruption*: to change our course, to accept fully the challenge of transformation in the concrete. We need the *grace of liberation*: to free us from the gravity that impedes the human spirit and anesthetizes our deepest desires for more fruitful, more creative living and loving. We need the *grace of risk*. This grace opens us to the promptings of the Spirit, to respond to the Word that calls, to speak and to listen to and to love and to act for and with one another. Grace nudges us to dis-ease and

of Washington Press, 1982); consider the 2017 public gathering of avowed white supremacists and neo-Nazis in Charlottesville, Virginia, see Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), <https://www.splcenter.org/hate-map>.

³¹ Petrella, *Beyond Liberation Theology*, Loc 104 of 5216, Kindle.

³² Augustine, Sermon 272 (PL 38: 1246-1248); Sermon 227 (PL 38: 1099-1101).

³³ What is at stake is the “socially informed body with . . . all its senses, that is to say, not only the traditional five senses . . . but also the sense of necessity and the sense of duty, the sense of direction and the sense of reality, the sense of balance and the sense of beauty, common sense and the sense of the sacred, tactile sense and the sense of responsibility, . . . the sense of propriety, the moral sense” Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 124.

³⁴ As a *Christian praxis*, solidarity is grounded in the confession of Jesus as Lord. Thus, when the gift of the Spirit leads a group of men and women to confess Jesus as Lord, the community we call church comes into being. This confession founds and realizes a common world of experience, understanding, judgment, decision, and commitment. This confession transforms patterns of human interaction and action; it evokes a new reality—transhistorical, transpolitical, transcultural

discomfort with whatever obscures the sight of the glory of God on the face of another human being.

Solidarity is a task realized by human subjects through, with, and in community. This community not is founded on personal preference; socially constructed prerogatives of history, creed, culture, race, gender, social condition, or sexual orientation are dismantled. The Resurrected Lord sends us to into streets and alleys, shelters and schools, homes and hospices to find and feed those who are despised, abused, and marginalized. These children, women, and men are the only sure sign of his presence among us in our efforts to be whom we receive at the table. Or to paraphrase Sawicki's wry observation: Jesus turns up in bodies other than his own.³⁵ Sitting at table, breaking and eating the bread and drinking from the one cup with these women and men involves an encounter with the presence of the crucified and risen Lord. We recognize him in those around the table, we repent our collusion and complicity in their suffering and oppression, we ask his and their forgiveness, we share the body of the Lord, we *become* the body of the Lord. These despised and brutalized women and men are our companions in the work of justice; they are our partners with whom we must struggle to find out what it means to live 'the way' of Jesus; standing beside them, working with them, we glimpse the promised *Parousia*, the great banquet.

CONCLUSION

With great feeling Ruy Costa writes of this relation:

A hurting body has been the symbol of solidarity for Christians since the institution of the Holy Communion: "This is my body, . . . This is my blood." The celebration of this body was perceived as a threat to the status quo, the Roman totality, and so became a *sacramentum*, that is, an underground encounter in which people made and renewed their solidarity with each other unto death.³⁶

Eucharist is the heart of Christian community, but it is an empty gesture, a mere routine or *pro forma* act, if we have not confessed our sins; repented of our participation and/or collusion in the marginalization of others; if we have not begged forgiveness from those whom we have offended; if we have not pledged firm purpose of amendment or reparations; if we have not moved to healing and creative (Christian) praxis.

The Eucharist is at the heart of the Christian community. Participation (*koinonia*) in the Body and Blood of Christ is a communion with the whole Christ: the suffering Christ, the exalted and risen Lord, the body of believers. Eating the bread and drinking the cup involves something much deeper and more extensive than consuming the elements of the ritual meal. There are social as well as sacramental consequences to the Eucharist: women and men must become what they have received; must do what they are being made. To be one in Christ Jesus means to reject those systems of living that authorize the denigration and murder of those who

³⁵ Sawicki, *Seeing the Lord*, 264.

³⁶ Ruy O. Costa, "Introduction," in *Struggles for Solidarity: Liberation Theologies in Tension*, eds., Lorine M. Getz and Ruy O. Costa (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 21.

are different than me and mine; those systems that deprive children and women and men of human and political rights; those systems that oppress the poor, suppress women, promote discrimination, obstruct the legitimate self-determination and human flourishing of peoples. We cannot live authentically—that is, *attentively, intelligently, reasonably, responsibly*—under the aegis of the reign of God, while we continue to sleep through the deformation and distortion of the whole of God’s people. Johann Baptist Metz reminds us that “the faith of Christians is a praxis in history and society that is to be understood as hope in solidarity in the God of Jesus as the God of the living and the dead who calls all people to be subjects in the divine presence.”³⁷

Thus, we are called to be the Body of Christ, living as Jesus of Nazareth lived subordinating our personal and collective, social and cultural decisions to the coming reign of God. We are called to follow this Jesus to those who are broken, abused, despised, and dispossessed. These are the children, women, and men whom we must seek out: they require our compassion and solidarity. These are the children, women, and men who are our comrades in the work of justice; they are the partners with whom we must struggle to find out what it means to live authentically; with them we have a future, without them we have nothing. And when we stand and speak and live in solidarity with them, we realize ourselves as the body of Christ. For that phrase ‘body of Christ’ *can be no mere metaphor*. It denotes a way of being in the world and with one another with Christ through the Spirit to the glory of God the Father. I can do no better than close with Augustine’s forceful admonition: “... *you are the body of Christ and [his] members, it is your own mystery that has been placed on the Lord’s table; what you receive is your own mystery Be what you see [there], and receive what you are.*”³⁸

³⁷ Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 76.

³⁸ Augustine, *Essential Sermon.*, trans. Edmund Hill. *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (Hyde Park, New York: New City Press, 2007), 317.