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## EUCHARIST/COMMUNION/LORD'S SUPPER – THE UTOPIA OF JESUS IN OUR DAYS

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Ceia do Senhor/ Santa Ceia/ Eucaristia – A utopia de Jesus em nossos dias

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### Abstract:

The Lord's Supper/Communion/Eucharist is one of the most powerful rituals of the Christian faith. In this chapter, I try to expand the understanding of this precious meal for our time. In order to do that I introduce the meal as an overarching event in the life of the world and consider some communitarian, social conditions, as strong characteristics of this meal. With that information, I go through the New Testament to see what was happening at the beginning of the church. After that I develop some fundamental aspects of the Eucharistic meal for our time considering the possible relations between Eucharist and Socialism, associating this Christian ritual with social visibility and against social humiliation. I finish mentioning Clarice Lispector a Brazilian writer who said that "love is bread shared among strangers."

### Keywords:

Eucharistic Meal. Early Church. Common Life. Socialism. Social Visibility. Social Humiliation.

### Resumo:

A Ceia do Senhor/Santa Ceia/Eucaristia é um dos rituais mais poderosos da fé cristã. Neste capítulo, tento ampliar a compreensão desta refeição que deu forma e conteúdo à religião cristã para o nosso tempo. Para isso, eu apresento essa ceia como um evento global na vida do mundo e considero algumas condições sociais, comunitárias como fortes características dessa refeição. Com essa informação, eu atravesso o Novo Testamento para ver o que estava acontecendo no início da igreja. A partir do desenvolvimento de alguns aspectos fundamentais da refeição eucarística para o nosso tempo, considero as possíveis relações entre Eucaristia e socialismo, associando esse ritual cristão com a visibilidade social e contra a humilhação social. Eu termino usando Clarice Lispector que disse que "o amor é pão partilhado entre estranhos."

### Palavras-chave:

Refeição Eucarística. Igreja Primitiva. Vida Comum. Socialismo. Visibilidade Social. Humilhação Social.

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*If you really want to make a friend, go to someone's house and eat with him...  
The people who give you their food give you their heart.*

**César Chávez**

*If you wish to live in that good place where no one is hungry,  
now in this evil place, break bread with the hungry.*

**St. Augustine of Hippo**

*Give us this day our daily bread Monsanto...  
for they want the kingdom, the power and the glory...  
'My Kingdom come, says capital.*

**Nancy Cardoso Pereira**

*Humanity has two groups: the group of those who do not eat and the group of those who do not  
sleep, afraid of the rebellion of those who don't eat.*

**Josué de Castro**

*There is no longer a war on hunger in this country.*

*There is no longer a war on poverty.*

*There is a war on the hungry.*

*There is a war on the poor.*

**The Rev. David R. Henson**

*If this is going to be a Christian nation that doesn't help the poor, either we have to pretend that  
Jesus was just as selfish as we are, or we've got to acknowledge that He commanded us to love the  
poor and serve the needy without condition and then admit that we just don't want to do it.*

**Stephen Colbert**

*The Eucharist can never be understood apart from economics and ethics.*

**Nathan Mitchell**

## **Introduction**

What do we love when we participate in the Eucharistic Sacrament? How do we love God and one another when we partake in the meal of the Kin-dom of God?

The meal of the reign of God is a wonder to behold, a map for the traveler, a safe arrival place for the lost, a resting place for the wanderer, a balm in Gilead for the hurt and bruised, a welcoming space for the foreigner, free food for the hungry, free drink for the thirsty and soup for the sick, hugs of affection and words of care for the abandoned, a kiss for the untouchable, a soul for the dispirited, a lingering place where the body can catch up with the soul, a safety light for those lost in the dark night of the soul, a port for anyone to arrive and rest, an endless celebration of life, a carnival for the body, a shameless proclamation that a new world is possible and it is offered right here, a promise of new life in our hearts, a band announcing on the streets of the city the arrival of the one who was to come and is now playing in our backyard, a rush of joy never felt,

a soft caress for those whose faces were disfigured by fire, accident or acid, a firm grip on the hand of those fainting, an embrace that shelters children in the midst of crossing bullets, a shout of glory and alleluia to the world, a dancing place for falling angels, a tear of joy and words that beg forgiveness for those who were not accepted at the table because of their sexualities, a place where a barren mother gives birth, where a child and the elderly have dreams, a prison unlocked, people holding hands freely with whomever they love, visibility for the ones placed under the shadow of society, a job that feeds the family, a moment where fear or anxiety are replaced by love and trust, education for every child in the house, universal healthcare, forgiveness of sins, smiles going everywhere, restorative justice, healing for all, songs of all kinds being sung and danced to, an inter-religious house where diversity is necessary, a shelter with a real address where anyone can live and receive their mail, a place to be found, cared for, fed, clothed, warmed, protected, healed, made fresh and new. In the name, passion, death and resurrection of Jesus.

The Eucharistic sacrament is one of those religious/social events that carries the grain of deep and profound changes and transformations; a reservoir that holds the potential of a new world breaking in where equality is not only possible but is indeed the only way to live. The Eucharistic ritual is an invitation for all to live in commensality, mutual appreciation, care and love. The sacrament destroys every Empire and any political system that tries to trap the poor. The sharing of life debunks kings, presidents and market rulers, demolishes absolute powers and keeps a critical approach to any constituted power. This meal gives us a good measure of what life is all about. Every time bread is broken and wine shared, we hear this call to go, arm in arm with the poor, against the powers that be! This table is memory and witness to God's glory and majesty, and it is for all, but preferentially, it belongs to the poor. The rich come afterward, are served after the poor, and it will be done this way until no people are poor anymore. That is because this table belongs to Jesus, the one who cared deeply for the poor and the invisible ones and loved them to the very end. So in, under, above, at and around this table, we continue Jesus' life, passion and ministry of loving the least of these. The Eucharist is this pedagogical performance where, by remembering Jesus, we all learn how to love more and love better. Surely, it is an event full of praise, mutual love, honor, forgiveness and life anew.

The dangerous memory of Jesus that feeds us today around the Eucharistic tables in joyful celebrations is the same memory that gave life to the Christians in the early churches. Acts 2 says that this new community was born out of the Holy Spirit and they were able to move along, not without problems, sharing all they had. That was the tradition followed by the early Christians. We learn from them that to live the Christian faith is to organize life together through right relationships. In God, the personal and the social relations are intermingled, and all of it is deeply related to this ritual of eating together, the sharing of this table. *The Didache* from the first Century says:

Share everything with your brother. Do not say: 'it is private property.' If you share what is everlasting, you should be that much more willing to share things which do not last... On the Lord's Day, gather in community to break bread and offer thanks. But confess your sins first, so that your sacrifice may be a pure one. No one who has a quarrel with his brother may join your gathering, not until they are reconciled.<sup>2</sup>

We see St. Basil, 330-379, being very harsh on the rich:

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<sup>2</sup> *DIDACHE: The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*. Disponível em: <<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/didache-lake.html>>. Acesso em: 29 jul. 2015. Capítulo 4.

The rich take what belongs to everyone, and claim they have the right to own it, to monopolize it... What keeps you from giving now? Isn't the poor man there? Aren't your own warehouses full? Isn't the reward promised? The command is clear: the hungry man is dying now, the naked man is freezing now, the man in debt is beaten now, and you want to wait until tomorrow? 'I am not doing any harm,' you say! 'I just want to keep what I own, that is all.' You are like someone who sits down in a theater and keeps everyone else away, saying that what is there for everyone's use is his own... If everyone took only what he needed and gave the rest to those in need, there would be no such thing as rich and poor. After all, didn't you come into life naked; and won't you return naked to the earth? ... The bread in your cupboard belongs to the hungry man; the coat hanging unused in your closet belongs to the man who needs it; the shoes rotting in your closet belong to the man who has no shoes; the money with you put in the bank belongs to the poor. You do wrong to everyone you could help, but fail to help.<sup>3</sup>

He knew that living with excess was not about doing visible harm, but that this way of living did indeed harm others. The challenges proposed here is not easy, since it is nothing less than a radical one, without rationalization for excuses. The following of Jesus has never been easy and it goes on challenging our whole way of life. The early Christian lifestyles were so powerful that they made Aristides, a non-Christian, attest and defend Christians before Hadrian, saying the following:

Christians love one another. They never fail to help widows; they save orphans from those who would hurt them. If a man has something, he gives freely to the man who has nothing. If they see a stranger Christians take him home and are happy, as though he were a real brother. They don't consider themselves brothers in the usual sense, but brothers instead through the Spirit, in God. And if they hear that one of them is in jail, or persecuted for professing the name of their redeemer, they all give him what he needs. If it is possible, they bail him out. If one of them is poor and there isn't enough food to go around, they fast several days to give him the food he needs... This is really a new kind of person. There is something divine in them.<sup>4</sup>

What leaves Aristides in awe with these Christians is the way they treat people. For him this could only be explained by the fact that *there is something divine about them*. Christians lived by deeds! By the grace of God! Gracious deeds towards the least of these, through and through, all the way!

We also see that St Chrysostom was harsh on the Christians and reminded them about the care they were supposed to have for each other:

Do you wish to honor the Body of Christ? Do not despise him when he is naked. Do not honor him here in the church building with silks, only to neglect him outside, when he is suffering from cold and nakedness. For he who said, 'This is my body' is the same who said 'You saw me, a hungry man and you did not give me to eat.' Of what use is it to load the table of Christ? Feed the hungry and then come and decorate the table. You are making a golden chalice and you do not give a cup of cold water? The Temple of your afflicted brother's body is more precious than this Temple (the church). The Body of Christ becomes for you an altar. It is more holy than the altar of stone on which you celebrate

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<sup>3</sup> Saint Basil apud: BALASURIYA, Tissa. *The Eucharist and Human Liberation*. Eugene: Wipft&Stock, 2004. p. 25-26.

<sup>4</sup> BALASURIYA, 2004, p. 26.

the holy sacrifice. You are able to contemplate this altar everywhere, in the street and in the open squares.<sup>5</sup>

As we move forward, we see Saint Bernard, from the Middle Ages, also saying the same things but now contrasting the pompous church buildings with the poor. He knew the very structure of the monetary movement:

Thus wealth is drawn up by ropes of wealth, thus money bringeth money... Oh vanity of vanities, yet no more vain than insane! The church is resplendent in her walls, beggarly in her poor. She clothes her stones in gold and leaves her sons naked.<sup>6</sup>

It is as if he is talking to us today, the church of Jesus Christ that can expend thousands of dollars in stain glass windows and cooling their church buildings, but doesn't mind people going hungry or leaving beggars on the cold and dangerous streets when church facilities remain closed during the week.

Nowadays, however, we also see a cloud of different witnesses around the globe witnessing churches that care for one another. Let me mention just one witness that is happening now in a very small town in Brazil. A 200 member Assembly of God Church is using the money of its tithes and offerings to buy land and build houses for the most socially vulnerable in that area. The criterion according to Fábio Mendonça, the pastor, is simply this: people's needs. Andréa Silva Rocha, one of the people who received a house, said: "I was cared for in the moment that I needed it most. Now I have the safety of a home." The project is done by the pastor and other members, who work to build the houses together for free. "It was like this," said the pastor, "one person gave a thousand bricks, another two sinks and so on. I now have two elderly women living in the pastor's study and in the children's Sunday school room, waiting to go to their new houses." During the building of the house people cook and eat together, their lives are intricately mixed with one another, one meal being the Eucharist of the other. It is a powerful testimony of thanksgiving to Acts 2 where the sharing of lives and things were done in its fullness.<sup>7</sup>

As we see, it is not because some people didn't respect this way of living at the beginning of the Gospel that we should do away with the project of sharing our lives and things. To dismiss the early project of the church is to dismiss the gospel of Jesus on behalf of our own comfortable needs. We might not be doing any harm to anyone, but we will need to listen to St. Basil again and again about what is at stake in this faith. We cannot blame sin and say, "well we will never be able to do that, so let's just forget it." The sinful, broken, lost aspect of our humanity does not prevent us from preaching and living the gospel. We have the grace of God that empowers us to do way more than we hope or imagine! The grace of God is all we need. Marx believed that the proletariat could change the system. Freud believed that analysis could change people. Che Guevara, Rosa Luxembour, Gandhi and many others believed in a new society even though they might have never believed in the grace of God. But we do! With or without Marx and Freud, Che Guevara, Rosa Luxembour and Gandhi, we can do it! With them however, we can do better! With the grace of God, we can do more with our theologies than just feed the birds.

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<sup>5</sup> St Chrysostom apud: BALASURIYA, 2004, p. 26-27.

<sup>6</sup> St Bernard apud: BALASURIYA, 2004, p. 27.

<sup>7</sup> O CIDADAO RJ – o portal de notícias da Região dos Lagos. *Araruama: Igreja investe dízimos e ofertas na construção de casas para membros sem moradia.* Disponível em: <<http://ocidadaorj.com.br/site/2013/08/22/igreja-investe-dizimos-e-ofertas-na-construcao-de-casas-para-membros-sem-moradia/#ixzz2dNBWZKKJ>>. Acesso em: 22 jul. 2015.

## What does Eucharist have to do with our time? Communion and Common Life.

As we consider the commandment of Jesus: “Do this in remembrance of me,” we must consider the understandings and practices of the sacrament of the Eucharist from the place of the poor, the beggars and the socially invisible. Some traditions beautifully shout “remember the poor” at the end of the worship service before we leave the church. Powerful! But now let us shout, “remember the poor” at the beginning of the worship and from this shout, organize our liturgical practices, songs and prayers, reading the Bible, preaching and theological understandings for our worship services. Why the poor? Because at the table, we remember the One who was poor, the one who said that we did for him anything we did for the poor and the socially invisible. Thus, we must figure out how to respond to situations of poverty and exclusion in our present day and try to reconfigure the sacrament, as well as our uneasy, dreadful, troubling, anguishing world. In this way, we are engaging the liturgy of the church, the liturgy of the neighbor and the liturgy of the world.

In the United States alone, 49 Million people go hungry in some way.<sup>8</sup> Their cries, along with those of two thirds of the world, go to the skies and while their cries often seem to fall on deaf ears of most of the other 1/3 of the world, they do not go unheard to God. The United Nations says that more than 800 million people go hungry every day and 40% of the world’s population (2.8 billion people) live under the line of poverty. Almost half of the world does not have sanitation facilities. The industrialized countries, which count as less than 20% of the world’s population, consume 80% of all of the natural resources. Worse, the three richest individuals on earth own more money than 48 countries combined! That means that 3 individuals have more money than 600 million people! The numbers of disparity do not stop: the 257 richest people together have more money than 40% of the whole world. The general secretary of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon and so many others are saying repeatedly that our social-economic model is exhausted and we cannot afford it much longer. Agriculture, for instance, is using 70% of the world’s water to produce our food and there is enough food to feed everyone. However, the use of water, land, resources and the distribution of this food are deeply marked by disparities.

All of these numbers come crashing down on our Eucharistic tables/altars. As we recite the *Sursum Corda*, “The Lord be with you,” the scream of the hungry crosses this dialogue asking for some consistency between the liturgical theological language, the proposal of the table and the ways we organize our society. The food we eat at the table and the way we eat it are not detached from the ways we organize the world. What can the sacrament of the Eucharist teach us about a world where people must fight for equality? What can it teach us about a more sustainable world? How can the eucharist help us to find ways of acting upon this tragic situation in the name of the love of Jesus?

The transcendence/immanence of the Eucharist and Baptism must challenge what our culture wants to make transcendent. For instance, the agribusiness wants to transcend any necessary law or regulation that concerns the limits of the land. In the same way, men want to rule over the bodies of women, as if women should only listen and accept their reasons. These “will to power,” to transcendent power, must be contested and the sacraments can help us offer limits. The sacredness of the food on the table and the water in our baptismal fountains will make the

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<sup>8</sup> A PLACE at the Table. Production of Kristi Jacobson e Lori Silverbushpor. New York, Magnolia Pictures, 2012. DVD. Book: PARTICIPANT MEDIA; PRINGLE, Peter (Ed.). *A Place at the Table: The Crisis of 49 Million Hungry Americans and How to Solve It*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2013.

powers that be very immanent, that is, ready to be taken by us and transformed by *the people*, who will take it over! The sacraments have a severe word of woe to the people who are ruling our time. The sacraments demand honor for women's bodies and decisions made with the voices of women. They cry woe to the greedy businesses that steal small farmer's lands, genetically alter our food, transform our food into fuel, destroy the biodiversity of our environment and say that this is the only way to be. No, we say! And we continue: God's creation set a time for the soil to rest and to develop, a time that we cannot speed up and a land that we cannot overuse. The Eucharist, indeed, has deep roots in the soil and watches over its uses, against monocultures or consumerism beyond the limits of the earth. The food we eat together must be done right and the relationships around this table must be right. Thus the sacraments have high standards about the ways we produce any good and the way we distribute it.

Nancy Cardoso says, "the table of God has problems connecting the bread of communion with the words of Jesus 'this is my body.' It also struggles to connect these two with the places that lack bread and the situations where workers produce the very bread we eat." She goes on to say how our Eucharistic bread is all tied up with other companies:

The divine beings vying to bring 'our daily bread' to our tables feed not only on the total control of the processes of food production and distribution, but are also gobbling up the forms of consumption represented by quick-moving fast-food outlets. Today, world trade in agricultural products – especially cereals, meat and dairy products – is controlled by no more than twenty oligopolistic groups of transnational corporations located in the United States and Europe. 'Give us this day our daily bread, O Monsanto, Cargill, Swift, Anglo, ADM, Nestlé, Danone, Syngenta, Bunge!'<sup>9</sup>

We have made the Welch family rich by using their grape juices in our communions. Our sacred tables are associated with the supermarkets where we buy our food or the restaurants where we eat.<sup>10</sup> We must be more concerned with the ways of production, distribution and the laws that organize it all. From the soil to the Eucharistic table, who is affected by it? Who owns the soil and the seeds, who is planting and harvesting? Who is distributing the goods or selling them in stores? The very protectionism of the agricultural economic laws of the United States and NATO agreements cannot bypass our eating the bread and drinking the wine.

Yes, Eucharist and baptism are about right personal and social relationships and about fixing them! The Eucharist ritual is never an individual event but rather, a collective action, a movement of God's love towards a new world. The Christian ritual of eating together helps us rescue a social language: community, collective, people, togetherness, solidarity, and so on, a vocabulary that goes beyond the private, the "me, me, me," of our culture and restitutes words such as common, belonging, sharing, being each other's keepers and so on. In the Christian faith, we never do anything alone. This faith is fundamentally a faith of a group, of many, of a bunch, located in a specific social locations. The criteria of Jesus presence is simple: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."<sup>11</sup> Christ, also, lives in a community: the trinity. Our life with God is only possible because of a social belonging, where each individual is identified with a larger people which, in its beginning, middle and end, is about belonging in a

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<sup>9</sup> Nancy Cardoso Pereira, "Empire and religion: gospel, ecumenism and prophecy for the 21st century," a lecture given at the 9th Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Brazil, February 2006. Not Published.

<sup>10</sup> SHATKIN, Elina. *Behind the Kitchen Door: ROC-LA Report Reveals Restaurant Industry Inequality*. Disponível em: <[http://blogs.laweekly.com/squidink/2011/02/behind\\_the\\_kitchen\\_door\\_roc-la\\_report\\_reveals\\_restaurant\\_industry\\_inequality.php](http://blogs.laweekly.com/squidink/2011/02/behind_the_kitchen_door_roc-la_report_reveals_restaurant_industry_inequality.php)>. Acesso em: 28 jul. 2015.

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 18:20, Holy Bible, NRSV.

community, the people of God, the family of God, the whole of humankind. “Ubuntu!” we cry out, I am because we are and we are because I am.

The Eucharist pushes us back time and again to consider what kind of society we have or want to have, and in order to do that we must look first at the ways in which we treat the poor. Lately, there has been a war waged against the poor. The growing prison industrial complex for instance, is a way of organizing society by getting rid of the garbage of society: the unemployed, people with mental illness, the homeless, the drug-addicted, immigrants, and illiterate people.<sup>12</sup> Since the government is failing to provide what they need, it is easier to lock them up and put them away. The poor cannot stay on the streets since there are endless rules that forbid them to lay down on the streets, benches in parks, etc. One is clearly reminded of Jesus who said that he didn’t have a place to lay his head. A Report by The National Coalition for the Homeless and The National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty on “Prohibitions on Sharing Food with People Experiencing Homelessness” is disturbing and says that “more cities have chosen to target homeless individuals by restricting groups or individuals who share food with homeless people in private and public spaces, since 2007.”<sup>13</sup>

Rev. David R. Henson says “across the country, cities and lawmakers are targeting people who are homeless (and those who help them) for arrest and for removal.” It is hard to believe but it is true. Rev. Henson continues:

Cities have made it illegal to lie down. They have made it illegal to share a meal with people who are homeless. They have made it illegal to sit in parks or on benches for long periods of time. They have made it illegal to eat in public spaces. They change their parks’ watering schedules to douse anyone staying there after hours. They have removed completely and banned park benches. They have banned panhandling.<sup>14</sup>

As the organization *Food not Bombs* says, “Food is a Right not a Privilege. Sharing food with the hungry is an unregulated act of kindness. Rescind all laws restricting compassion.”<sup>15</sup> As Rev. Henson reminds us vividly:

As a Christian, I know Jesus teaches us that we are to offer food to the hungry, to welcome the stranger, to give water to the thirsty — the least of these on the margins of society. But he goes much farther than that. He identifies with the least of these so much so that he says any time there is a hungry, thirsty or ostracized person, that person is Christ

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<sup>12</sup> ALEXANDER, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colored blindness*. New York: New Press, 2011. p. 25-36. Clearly, a society that is organized with mechanisms to get rid of its minorities. African Americans composes less than 13% of the US population but is over 50 percent of the Jail and Prison Population. The same way, Latinos/Hispanics are 15 percent of the US population, but composes over 35 percent of the prison and jail population. These numbers come from: Snyder, Howard N. and Mulako-Wangota, Joseph. Bureau of Justice Statistics. Washington Press, 2013.

<sup>13</sup> THE NATIONAL COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS; THE NATIONAL LAW CENTER ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY. *A Place at the Table: Prohibitions on Sharing Food with People Experiencing Homelessness*. Disponível em: <[http://nationalhomeless.org/publications/foodsharing/Food\\_Sharing\\_2010.pdf](http://nationalhomeless.org/publications/foodsharing/Food_Sharing_2010.pdf)>. Acesso em 28 jul. 2015.

<sup>14</sup> HENSON, David R. *Criminalizing Christ: The Love Wins Incident and the Nationwide Targeting of Homeless*. Disponível em: <<http://www.thegodarticle.com/state/-criminalizing-christ-the-love-wins-incident-and-the-nationwide-targeting-of-homeless>>. Acesso em: 28 jul. 2015.

<sup>15</sup> FOOD NOT BOMBS: defend our rights. Disponível em: <[http://www.foodnotbombs.net/fnb\\_resists.html](http://www.foodnotbombs.net/fnb_resists.html)>. Acesso em: 28 jul. 2015.



himself. And if we don't share our food, our water, or our welcome, then we are rejecting the Incarnation of God in this world.<sup>16</sup>

The poor are barred from places because it is said they bring down the price of properties. In Brazil, more than 30 favelas in São Paulo alone where the poor live have been set on fire, criminal fire, so they have to leave the space thus making the space open for housing companies to build expansive buildings and profit immensely.<sup>17</sup> Also, there have been incidents when youth set fire to the bodies of poor street people and run away. An indigenous man was killed recently.

Are the poor barred from our Eucharistic tables as well? Do we also have rules that prevent them from coming and eating with us? When we get to the table, what kind of society are we supporting? Where are the poor around our tables/altars? These are the questions that we, at the Lord's Supper, should always be asking.

### **Eucharist and Empire**

When we think/practice the Eucharist from the perspective of the poor and their social invisibility we must know that we practice/think from the heart of the Empire of our days. This Empire defines global laws, uses military apparatus, threatens those who go against itself, creates power structures with policies of protectionism, does not comply with international measures to address the ecological challenges and controls the economic market. Moreover, this Empire lives off of the blood and sweat of workers from across the globe and from local non-documented immigrants who work extra hours in inhuman situations for much less than the minimum wage. By way of a strange form of nationalism, the empire teaches us to hate the workers, accusing them of 'breaking the law' while the same empire creates unlawful conditions for them to stay "safe" under the shadow of the law, while they produce profit for the owners of companies and keep the price of food to an amount that won't affect inflation.

This Empire controls everything and offers a false sense that we are free! The empire also uses religion to divide us and keep our faith from inspiring/incorporating political choices and movements. Moreover, the Empire is selling us a life that is ever more disconnected from one another so as to have us lose our ability to fight against injustices.

Moreover, this Empire fosters a culture of social Darwinism and individual survival. What is praised by the Empire are values of individual heroism, which means the diminishing of a collective social change. What it says is that social changes become dependent on individual voluntarism, that is, someone has to start a project to remediate some acute social situation of disaster and then this individual becomes a celebrity for their good deed. In that sense, the social commitment that actually changes things are kept at bay. On the other hand, it helps churches and social organizations to appease the social disaster and move away from its responsibilities to offer possibilities for all to have a full life. By sustaining this way of organizing society, social actions become dependent on charity or good will. The social thread is weakened and makes it very difficult for grassroots movements of people to produce larger changes or to gain

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<sup>16</sup> HENSON, David R. *Criminalizing Christ: The Love Wins Incident and the Nationwide Targeting of Homeless*. Disponível em: <<http://www.thegodarticle.com/state/-criminalizing-christ-the-love-wins-incident-and-the-nationwide-targeting-of-homeless>>. Acesso em: 28 jul. 2015.

<sup>17</sup> CARVALHO, Igor. *O fogo contra as favelas*. Disponível em: <<http://revistaforum.com.br/blog/2012/06/o-fogo-contra-as-favelas/>>. Acesso em: 28 jul. 2015.

momentum. We are left with the sense that we ourselves must fight to find our own place under the sun, individually. Thus, the myth of individual freedom is authenticated as one of the true American values while using it to let few people control the lives of the whole country.

Throughout history, the Eucharist was used by empires to colonize the world. It associated itself with feudalism, capitalism and colonial projects that killed people and stole their richness. Tissa Balasuriya, a Sri Lankan priest and theologian makes very important connections between the Eucharist, Capitalism and Colonization. He says:

Over the centuries the spirituality of the Eucharist - of giving and not of grabbing - was obliterated. The Eucharist went side by side with the worst and largest-scale exploitation that the world has ever seen. The tragedy of the subordination of Christianity to European power politics was also a tragedy of the Eucharist. As the priests and monks went hand in hand with the colonialists, the Eucharist was desecrated in the service of empire. The close alliance between imperialism and the church.... Hence we must not be naive as to accept as 'faith, whatever beliefs or practices prevail at any given time concerning the Eucharist... For the Eucharist had become a means of helping the affluent people of the world (in Western Europe). The Mass was unrelated to the struggles of the exploited working classes. It even helped in their exploitation; it contributed to their mental subjugation.<sup>18</sup>

We have perverted and diminished the power and meaning of the sacrament. History tells us that the church did private communions and offered it for the forgiveness of sins as a monetary trade. We sold that which is most precious and sacred for us and we still do it. We have abandoned the common meal in exchange for a hierarchical structure and now only a few special people can celebrate it while others can only be at the receiving end of it. We took away the power of the very act of eating together and transformed it into meager bread and one small sip of wine, celebration with lots of words written by authorized people, scholars and intellectual pastors who prepared it from a specific context, most commonly Europe and the US, and expect that everybody else across the globe will regurgitate the same words from these wise (often) white heterosexual males.

Even though we have perverted this sacrament in many ways, the Lord's Supper continues to remind us that through its celebrations, we see God's presence in our midst through Jesus Christ. In any way, form, shape or order, the Eucharistic sacrament is an unending reservoir of liberation for the people of God and especially for the poor, a displacement of the Empire into the hands of the poor and lay people. People can and should celebrate it in any way they see as important in their local communities, holding in tension the wealth of the past wisdom with the eschatologically taste of what is coming from the future as it builds a present composed of justice where Jesus is glorified where he belongs: in the midst of the poor.

When the sacraments are enacted from the perspective of the poor and in connection with the word of God, we are called to conversion and to change our ways. Thus, to experience the sacraments in a local community is to undo the evil glory of the empire and build on God's shining glory, human equality and liberation.

Thus, if the Eucharist is not a movement, an event of glory and social change, a transformative event that flows in the life of a local community, a challenge to the evil selfish economic market, a stop sign to the evil forces that are criminalizing the poor, then we are only playing Jesus as a doll in God's doll house, doing whatever we want with him, enacting a gospel

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<sup>18</sup> BALASURIYA, 2004, p. 36-37.

without potency, a faith without effect, and spending lots of money on ourselves, making a mockery of the Jesus movement.

Then we wonder why people are not coming to church anymore. Our worship life has become a protection of our comfort zone, a fake enactment of a faith that does not and cannot have any demand on us. At the moment we are challenged to hear a gospel that calls us to conversion, we hear people saying "don't tell me what to do," or "you are going too far." Once I went to preach to local pastors and on the table were red lollypops in the shape of a cross. For me, that was very telling of what we have done to this gospel-the cross, a symbol of shame, death, cruelty, revolution, was turned by the Empire into a red sugary lollypop.

Ours is a revolutionary gospel, one that gets us fighting for the socially invisible, making the wall between Mexico and US crumble, taking power away from politicians who work only for their own little empires, who keep health insurance only for an elite few, and deny shelter for the poor. If we are not debunking the empire when we share bread and wine, we are not paying attention to this precious powerful sacrament of the table/altar.

It is from this table, committed to and amidst the poor, that we think of the sacraments, our common communion, our very faith. It is from this place, in the middle of hunger and empty bellies, hearing the voices and cries of the poor, that we make sense of our faith and this ritual, that we organize our beliefs and commitments, and that we create our liturgies. It is here that I learn how to love my neighbors as Jesus would have loved them and only then, I realize how to worship and honor God and respect my faith. The book of Acts, the gospels, the whole New Testament and many historical moments still remind us of our life together, of our demand to share, of our persisting solidarity, waiting for each other.

Now, to fight the empire, we need a fusion of universes and disparate cultural and religious elements, the juxtaposition of the foreign with the native, the allowed and the forbidden, the male with the female and the queer, the sacred, the secular and the post-secular and post-sacred, the proper and the improper, the right, the wrong and all the gray in between, heaven and earth, good and bad theologies, early church fathers with contemporary church mothers, the possible and the impossible. In this process, we will live in the ambiguity between the thing and the word, in the paradoxes between things seen and unseen. As a result, we find a new totality of all of the traditions that came before us into something that is neither old nor new. And yet, there is still an endless need to be figured out in its thinking and practices. In this new awkward methodology, we rescue what was lost and lose what we thought we should keep. But we keep going through endless multi-inculturations of our faith without fear. Nobody can tame us! Neither the liturgical police nor the powers that be!

Let us now go back to the early first three centuries CE to look for some guidance.

### **New Testament – A Meal, a Full Meal**

The Gospels point to Jesus' life always in relation to people, all kinds of people. Immersed in his culture, he offered a furious critique of the injustice and oppression of the Empire of his time. Time and again he challenged it, offering a new life lived together where each one cares for the other. He preached a gospel that made people mad, that called people away from their unchallenged ways of doing business, that gave people limits to what they could have, that demanded people share what they had, that announced that his gospel would divide people and families, a gospel so powerful not everyone would like it. His gospel was too radical- it asked

nothing else but one's entire life. In order to follow Jesus one could not only meet him once a week but rather, one would have to leave everything behind, which included any kind of wealth and family.

It was this troublesome radical prophetic kerygma and discourse that got him in real trouble. It was as if he would go against big business corporations, against the market that exploits people, the Parties that rule for themselves, those who scream vociferously without any care for somebody else. He would camp around the wall between Mexico and US and would stay there until it was taken down. In a holistic engagement with life, he engaged personal and social healing, proposed a kingdom that would change the present, the past and the future, and denounced the economic, social, political, religious, and gender abuse of his time. This gospel is so hard to follow nowadays. I tell my students that I can only hope to be a Christian one day because what this gospel asks is too intense.

During his time, it was a common practice in Jesus' life to eat with his friends. The gospels show us many meals between Jesus and his friends and one of the reasons is that to eat together was a very important social event with a strong social function in society. The Eucharist in early Christianity was represented through the social institution of meals/banquets within the Greco-Roman world. Meals, i.e., banquets, in all their diversity, were not marginal or private social events; they were a central element within the cultural structure of the Greco-Roman period, which extended from 300 B.C.E. to 300 C.E. The Greco-Roman societies, including Jewish and later Christian groups, were patterned around these meals and gathering together to eat and drink was an important element in the structuring of a very diverse society by providing a sense of cohesion, belonging, and social obligation. How so? Here are some of the certain aspects of the banquet in relation to the formation of society:

**Social Values.** The banquet as a social institution was responsible for keeping one of the largest social threads. The meals enforced justice, equality and friendship; and blurred the secular and sacred. Banquets did not separate the secular and the sacred. In almost every banquet there was a prayer, a song or a libation to a god. What distinguished the religious banquets from other banquets was the emphasis on the purpose and themes developed by each social group.

**Host, location and Invitation.** A host would invite his friends to the meal, usually at his home. The architecture of the house was built around the dining room, which was the most decorated room and closest to the main door. However, these meals could also be held in temples and other buildings. There were many reasons why hosts had meals: the festive joy of eating with friends, philosophical discussions, celebrating someone's birthday, a public honor received, weddings, somebody's death, a gathering of a specific group or a sacrifice to the gods. Written and oral invitations were usually given a few days in advance or even the day before the event.

**Guests and Ranking.** Usually, banquets were social events where people of the same social status gathered to eat together. In spite of different themes developed within these banquets, they were occasions to draw together people from the same social group. The sharing of place, food and time created a strong social bond. However, there was always social ranking at every banquet; the most important guests would sit to the right of the host and the less important to the left. Nonetheless, the permeable boundaries of this ranking were often trespassed. It is not uncommon to find in the literature uninvited guests or late-comers who would lose their seat/rank to a lower ranked guest, or even guests who would come unexpectedly and take over the place of the host.

**Space, Welcoming, Eating.** The banquets were usually held in the dining room of the host's house, which usually seated nine guests on couches spread around a square room. Hosts would have their guests' hands and feet washed before their placement at the couches. Food was served either on small tables or passed around by the guests. After the first course of the meal (*deipnon*), the floor would be cleaned so that the guests could enjoy the second course of the meal (*symposion*) where an extended drinking party (wine mixed with water) would be offered; guests would be entertained by either music or pleasant discussion of a pre-determined theme. The symposium could last from two to almost four hours.

**Social Predicaments.** The banquet not only concerned eating etiquette, but also had a strong ethical component attached to it. According to Smith, there were three main "theoretical bases for the meal ethics," which were *koinonia*, friendship and pleasure or festive joy. These elements were not fortuitous or random components within the social institution of the banquet, but were ethical principles that served to structure not only the meal itself but also the core of society at large. With these ethical standards, the banquets became a cultural symbol that nurtured values of "celebration, community, equality," and strengthened society's bonding structures.

These elements were customs, instructions, limits and central features of the "proper meal." Moreover, these elements were present in some way in every meal and varied according to the emphasis and specificities of different social groups. Thus, the current idea that the Christian Eucharist was a singular historical singular event created by Jesus, does not coincide with many of the resources we have today. Jesus' meal with his disciples might have been defined around these meal structures that the early Christian church also picked up. Thus, the early churches were marked by social values and marked by the specificities of various social groups.

Commensality, radical welcoming, sharing, *koinonia*, *isonomia*, friendship, joy, all of these elements were part of the common meal, things that we could aspire and should thrive to bring back to our common eating together. However, we have to do more than that now. Our situation is different and we are to attend to the signs of our times and reshape the meal according to the social, economic, religious, and cultural challenges of our time.

## **Eucharist and Socialism**

The Brazilian Catholic Friar, Frei Betto, said once that people should call the police when Christians celebrate the Eucharist because "we are questioning the social order that does not share bread and drink the same way."<sup>19</sup> Because this is such a radical religious movement, such a disruptive event in the life of society and in the plans of the Empire, the powers that be should indeed be deeply concerned. Frei Betto goes on to say that "the eucharist is the most socialist of the sacraments of the church because it celebrates the sharing of the goods of the earth and the labor of human work."<sup>20</sup>

Tissa Balasuriya, mentioned above, wrote perhaps the most important contemporary book on Eucharist. However due to his libertarian positions, he was attacked and is now almost completely dismissed by the liturgical field. There is a reason that I came to know Balasuriya's work by way of Latin American theologians and have hardly heard his name from any liturgical

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<sup>19</sup> BETTO, Frei. *Eucaristia e Socialismo*. IN: BOFF, Leonardo; BETTO, Frei. *Mística e espiritualidade*. Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1994. p. 41.

<sup>20</sup> BETTO, 1994, p. 41.

theologian from the United States or Europe. The sources for “proper” liturgical theology are never or rarely located in the South of the world. Notwithstanding, Balasuriya, being from a marginal country (how can any good theological thinking come from Sri Lanka?) deeply associates Eucharist with socialism and human liberation in powerful ways. Again a lengthy quotation from his book:

In a sense the Eucharist and the inspiration toward socialism are intimately linked in their historical sources. The first Eucharistic communities were ones that encouraged a socialistic form of living. This related only to distribution of goods and not the mode of production; yet it has been a source of inspiration for much radical social thought of later periods... The Eucharist signified sharing. It also brought about what it signified. The rite and the reality were intimately linked. The symbol was for real. They tried to practice what they professed... For Jesus, too, the Last Supper, the first and inaugural Eucharist, was closely associated with his self-giving.<sup>21</sup>

Balasuriya's interpretation of the Eucharist is marked by self-giving, sharing in solidarity, a ritual not only departmentalized in a separate ritual but a sign of how life should be organized as a whole. Jesus' self-giving was nothing less than the giving of his own life. He relates love with mutual care and makes powerful relations or juxtapositions:

Since love is to be for all, sharing must also be with all others too. The Eucharist is anti-individualistic. It is not compatible with a philosophy of selfish profit maximization for persons or private groups. The Eucharist cannot really coexist with vast gaps of wealth and misery. This would be a mockery of Jesus and his message. The Eucharist does not indicate a mode of production or a form of social organization. But it does demand effective sharing in freedom. In this sense the Eucharist relates better to an effective socialist society. No one should be in need. All things should be for the needs of all. Self-sacrifice must be prior to selfishness and acquisition of things to oneself. Since the Eucharist demands that we live for others, how much more does it demand that we should work for them. If our life has to be given for others in truth, love and justice, how much more does it demand that property be for all? Thus the Eucharist emphasizes basic values which are closely related to the ideals and priorities of a socialist way of life.<sup>22</sup>

The word socialism is so loaded with negative understandings in US culture that the mere pronouncing of the word already brings a certain stigma to the person who says it. The stigma being, s/he is a communist, not a true "American," a threat to the American way of life, and so on. These stigmas often serve to attack someone and then drop the discussion; so one is never even allowed to say what socialism means. The way I am using the word here is to emphasize the social sharing of our common goods and the profits of labor production. In socialism, we are all responsible for each other, thus we all have access to the common good: land, water, food and its richness, and we all provide public access to all concerning health insurance, public education, care for the elderly and special attendance to those who cannot care for themselves. We all own collectively and locally what God has given to us all.

Here is a definition of socialism that can work for our Christian faith:

...it is an ideology or system of beliefs about how society, and particularly production, ought to be organized for the common good of all rather than for an elite minority.... In all

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<sup>21</sup> BALASURIYA, 2004, p. 79-80.

<sup>22</sup> BALASURIYA, 2004, p. 80-81.

cases the objective of common ownership is to bring about an egalitarian society in which individuals are not forced to labor using productive capacities owned by others who appropriate the greater share of the wealth produced despite a much smaller contribution of effort.<sup>23</sup>

The shared life at the table tells us about a society where people care for people so everybody can have a dignified life. When we let the sources of society remain in the hands of a few people, the desire of these people defines and controls the state and the rules for themselves and others. We must know that we should be concerned with our “sinful nature,” and our desire to take advantage, to kill, to destroy, to abuse and to offer regulations so only some can benefit. If the private trumps the social, when class struggle is a way of structuring society, when some profit from the labor of others, we are heading into the direction of oppression, chaos, disasters and death. Grounded on the Eucharistic values of the Christian faith, we fight against it. In society everybody needs a limit because without limit, 2% will own most of the wealth and 98% will have less than those very few, some will have plenty and some will starve.

Capitalism, as much as it is associated with the very being of the USA, it is not its best ally. On the contrary, it will end up killing its people as it is already doing. From Eucharistic grounds, we will criticize any form of government, economic structures or power relations, be they republican, democratic, independent, socialist, communist, neo-liberal, liberal or any form of constituted power/economy. The gospel does not prevent us from looking at the disasters of capitalism and how it has destroyed lives everywhere. Frei Betto said in an interview:

Everybody talks about the failure of socialism. That is funny because nobody talks about the failure of capitalism for 2/3 of humanity. According to United Nations, from the 7 billion people on our planet, 4 billion live under the line of poverty. Thus, we cannot say capitalism has been a success. Since nobody chooses a family or a social class to be born into, none of us should consider ourselves lucky to be born within the 1/3 of the population. Instead, we should consider a social debt to those who didn't have the same luck. And fight to end this biological lottery. Everybody must be born with full rights to be happy. While the Gospel preaches solidarity, capitalism preaches competition... while we preach that there is nothing above the human being for God, capitalism preaches that the priority is on the capital.<sup>24</sup>

Moreover, it isn't the case to save capitalism because it cannot be saved. As Richard Wolff said:

It's not to humanize capitalism... it's not working... It is not possible to give capitalism a soul... We have to face this... we can create programs, but food (and land) become commodities... another world is possible... Let's talk about the other... let's talk about it... This is not an intellectual debate, it's a practical debate... "As servants of God we commit

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<sup>23</sup> SOCIALISM. In: PARKER, Martin; FOURNIER, Valérie; REEDY, Patrick (Org.). *The Dictionary of Alternatives*. London and New York: Zed Books, 2007. p. 264.

<sup>24</sup> UM MUNDO de ação, transformação e filosofia na prática. Entrevista com Frei Betto. [16 jun. 2013]. Rádio CBN, Rio de Janeiro, 16 jun. 2013. Disponível em: <<http://cbn.globoradio.globo.com/programas/caminhos-alternativos/2013/06/15/UM-MUNDO-DE-ACAO-TRANSFORMACAO-E-FILOSOFIA-NA-PRATICA.htm>>. Acesso em: 28 jul. 2015.

in everything... in hard work, in the Holy Spirit... in glory and dishonor... having nothing, yet sharing everything.<sup>25</sup>

### **Eucharist and Social Visibility, Against Social Humiliation**

It is been said that that Luther's last words on a piece of paper before his death on February 18, 1546 were, "We are beggars. This is true." How true this is for all of us Christians! We are all beggars for the grace of God. What do we do with the socio-economic beggar? Are they any different from those of "us" who are beggars of the grace of God but are better off socially and economically? Here we can learn that the grace of God levels everybody into the same place: we are all beggars of God's grace and none of us are better than others, no one has special privilege and no one should go begging for food.

We should all rely on God's grace for love and mercy and for a life of justice and dignity. By God's grace, our work to restore the dignity of beggars has to do with stewardship of all our goods and how our churches are using their money. Our ethical demands of practicing solidarity keep life from disappearing. The social life/economics proposed by Jesus and present in the Eucharistic table carry no less than a larger set of difficult demands and social practices that foster a life of equality, justice and solidarity, also picked up by the poor.

In order to respond to the disasters of accumulation of wealth, we must rethink the table of Jesus Christ. Julio de Santa Ana, lay Methodist Uruguayan theologian who helped shape the ecumenical movement in Latin America, rethinks the sacrament of the Eucharist among the poor. In his precious little book published *Pão, Vinho e Amizade* (Bread, Wine and Friendship) he uses the work of Balasuriya (mentioned above) to relate the Eucharist with social transformation and solidarity with the poor:

'What is the meaning of fifty two Eucharist rites offered per year in a city, if from these celebrations there is no reduction of the distance that separates the rich and their mansions and the poor in its favelas?' When the participation of the sacrament does not lead us into the union with those who suffer, the Eucharist loses its sense of unity and it becomes only an intellectual, idealist act, without practical consequences.<sup>26</sup>

In the same way he tells us of other dangers of the Eucharist:

First, when the rite becomes a rigid formalism and deprives people from freedom and participation in it with spontaneity, the only thing left for people is to watch, making the ritual an unauthentic spiritual event; Second, in societies with bourgeoisie values, the Eucharist becomes more an intellectual event that does not make any change in society... Third, the deviation and danger of excess of emotionalism; Fourth, when social pressures turn the memorial of liberation into a way of domesticating and oppressing the believers. It is no secret that this sacrament has been manipulated according to dominant groups (feudal, capitalistic, racial, sexual, etc.) that have tried to manipulate the Eucharistic practice according to its own values and priorities.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> WOLFF, Richard. *Fighting for Economic Justice and Fair Wages*. Disponível em: <<http://billmoyers.com/segment/richard-wolff-on-capitalisms-destructive-power/>>. Acesso em: 28 jul. 2015.

<sup>26</sup> SANTA ANA, Julio de. *Pão, vinho e amizade: meditações*. Rio de Janeiro: CEDI, 1986. p. 20.

<sup>27</sup> SANTA ANA, 1986, p. 20-21.



Easter is a testimony to God's glory, to God's salvation to the world, to Jesus' life, death and resurrection issuing a constant call for liberation. At the table the Spirit moves towards us causing us to believe in a new world order, good news for the destitute, who can now be active participants in this rite. As Santa Ana says:

Participation at the table is a mark of the Kingdom of God... The Kingdom of God can be compared to the banquet where the famished are satisfied, because there will be full sharing between those who have and those who live in need... The Eucharistic richness, as we said, comes out in the practice of the faith of the people of God. As for the poor – that in Latin America were for a long time second class participants in the life of the church – they approach the table as first order actors in the development of the struggles that lead to the Kingdom of God, becoming more and more this immense number of symbols in this sacramental act instituted by Jesus.<sup>28</sup>

Our practices are to be created and recreated with the poor around the table, taking into consideration what we have received and what is around us. Our liturgies are often made by those who do not have any experience with poverty. As Tissa Balasuriya says “when the ‘controllers’ of theology and church discipline have no live experience of oppression, they are not likely to understand or even listen to the cries of the oppressed masses.”<sup>29</sup> Our Eucharistic prayers would be very different if made by those who are hungry or have no place to sleep.

Eucharistic prayers must be said with the movements of the bodies that are hurting, in need, oppressed, voiceless, with us all breathing together, being challenged by each other's prayers and practices, by the needs of each other so we can figure out how we can perform a love so great that we cannot understand or grasp it properly.

We need to reconstitute the place of the poor both within the sacramental language and concretely around the table. Without the poor, the celebration of the Eucharist is only an empty ritual meant to nourish our individual lives with the stamp “go in peace.” Without the presence of the poor, there is no celebration of joy, justice, peace or beauty. Without the poor, the sacrament is a private meal of those who own it, pretending to be public and for all. Without the poor, liberals and conservatives, liturgical and the so-called non-liturgical churches only feed themselves into a sorrowful self-pity, wrapped up in liturgy that serves to feed the material comfort of capitalism.

Not for us! In this ritual, the church brings light to the life of those who are placed under the shadow of society. At and around the table we are called by our name and we are offered food as if we really matter. Thus this table/altar is a lighthouse giving presence, solace, name, address, location and dignity to those who were the garbage of our system, the ones who cannot produce richness, those who are not fit to survive, those whose lives are out of the market, who are at the end of their lives and cannot produce anything else. The Christian faith has all to do with the remaking of somebody's humanity when the world wants to take it away. We the church call people somebody when our societies call them nobody. We redo people when the world undoes them, disdains them, breaks them, dismantles the thread that holds them together, making them less, without value, culture, beauty, as if they have nothing left to offer. This is what we learn from the Black church in the US, with the struggles against slavery and around the civil rights movement.

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<sup>28</sup> SANTA ANA, 1986, p. 24.

<sup>29</sup> BALASURIYA, 2004, p. 60.

José Moura Gonçalves Filho, a professor at the University of São Paulo, has worked on the notion of public invisibility and describes social humiliation this way,

Social humiliation corresponds to the experience in which we lose a trace or a feeling of humanity. A trace of humanity has its experience interrupted. An impediment that is neither natural or accidental but applied or sustained by other humans... Social humiliation is the suffering hold for a long period, ruminated.<sup>30</sup>

He goes on to say that, “Every culture has an ancestral suffering, repeated in many generations and in different forms. He mentions the black people and the indigenous people who lost their belongings, their rites, their beliefs, their festivities and were forced into labor, living under somebody else’s domination.”<sup>31</sup>

This form of humiliation exposes people in many ways: people who lose their land, who work in lower level work, or work to survive with the bare minimum; old people placed behind young people, or exposed to faster workers; women interrupted by their parents, brothers, husbands, teachers and bosses; lovers exposed when they love in a way that does not fit the acceptable; people named crazy by science, invalidated by the laws of court rooms; black and poor children stigmatized as carriers of intellectual deficiencies, effectively inept to function in the school system.

“The pain of the humiliated,” says José Moura,

[...] is never their individual pain, because in him/her, the pain is an old one, already divided between him/her and their brothers and sisters of destiny. The pain that comes from the outside will hit the inside paradoxically. The act of pain against them is felt before the act, even before it has meaning or they can grasp any rationality to the act. The pain precedes the conscious recognition, even more than pain that has long duration. The humiliated does not know why s/he cries and the humiliated never cries for him/herself, it cries an enigmatic pain, a shared pain.<sup>32</sup>

We are talking about a system that perpetuates the humiliation and erases the potentiality for action, any resolution for transformation and combat. As Steven Biko reminds us, “the most potent weapon of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.”

The church, fighting its own social class status, understands this situation and empowers the subjugated, offering symbolic and material tools for the remaking of the deepest threads of the self. The ritual symbols and the life in communion have enough to help people reorganize themselves and find a better place, a religious way of *re-ligare* (from the Latin word to connect back) what was lost, helping people to understand what is being communicated, moving people away from the exposure to death to the exposure to grace and love. The church and this life together help people to comprehend, to make sense, to reason, a social-existential tool that social humiliation has taken away. Even if some people can’t reason comprehensibly, the church will help, will be a witness, a solid presence for healing and transformation.

The church undoes the empire and messages that diminish people, criminalize the poor and control them with screams and shame. In other words, the church becomes a social place for

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<sup>30</sup> GONÇALVES FILHO, José Moura. *Humilhação Social: Humilhação Política*. In: PAULA SOUZA, Beatriz de (Org.). *Orientação à queixa escolar*. São Paulo: Casa do Psicólogo, 2007. p. 194.

<sup>31</sup> GONÇALVES FILHO, 2007, p. 194.

<sup>32</sup> GONÇALVES FILHO, 2007, p. 194.

the humiliated to become the subject of their own history! Now, through faith, through the social life lived together, the poor gain a way of organizing their lives without having to subjugate themselves to anybody else. Now, the present, the past and the future of their lives are in their hands for the construction of a new world. Power is transformed, shifted, taken away from the powers that be and is now in the hands of the poor.

What the sacraments aim to do is socially contest the status of the subaltern and reframe the social structure of the person and the society. From that regaining of life, other gestures and movements are possible. Once we are regained to ourselves and to society, we can play and relax and laugh. As José Moura says,

We can appreciate the appearance of things and care for certain things not because they are necessary but because they are beautiful. Desire for more than simple consumption or use. Work not only because we need to buy food or utensils but work as a way to create worlds, to create cultures. To act and practice the unexpected, to interrupt the natural and social machinery of things, and live today not only to repeat yesterday. To live beyond the immediate, to remember that which is gone, and to live in the hope of that which hasn't existed yet. To make conversation. To move oneself for political motifs, to enjoy the city, things that go beyond the limits of a household. Hospitality seen as a real possibility, the perception and shelter of people as they are considered unique and unmistakable. Solitude, the capacity to be alone, and, as Clarice Lispector once wrote, the ability to "have lunacy without being crazy."<sup>33</sup>

This is only possible by the commitment we have to one another. As José Moura affirms, "These experiences of reality and dignity are only possible by the witness of somebody else. Experiences that, when narrated, only find their meaning and effectiveness when listened to, when they join a circle of conversation that entails equal people."<sup>34</sup> That is why the church, when it embraces minorities, when it expands the circle of traditions, when it cares for the marginalized, outcast and the disenfranchised, opens itself to this possibility for equality where we can find ways of living life in expanded ways.

There is much to do around the table, around our baptismal fonts and our worship services. There are women, children, immigrants, foreigners, gays, lesbians and transgendered people, the poor and the ill, all of them who continue to be socially humiliated. In the name of a gospel of equality and abundant love, we are called to change that and offer a space first and foremost in the church so we can then rehearse it and mirror it in society. All must be able to play, tell their stories and feel life lived in its fullness. For nothing less than life in its fullness can be accepted by this gospel.<sup>35</sup>

### **Eucharist – Way More Than a Social Rite**

Julio de Santa Ana speaks of commensality as a mark of the kingdom of God. At the table, he says, "we share struggles and hopes, and there is a feeling of union that strengthens friendship."<sup>36</sup> He quotes R. Martin-Achard to say that

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<sup>33</sup> GONÇALVES FILHO, 2007, p. 194.

<sup>34</sup> GONÇALVES FILHO, 2007, p. 194.

<sup>35</sup> "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." John 10:10, Holy Bible, NRSV.

<sup>36</sup> SANTA ANA, 1986, p. 37.

[...] we cannot forget that the Passover refers to an event that is, at the same time, migration of a clan of semi-nomads, the liberation of a group of slaves and the act of God in favor of a poor people... This act expresses God's desire to redeem the world. It makes salvation the first and last word of God in the Bible.<sup>37</sup>

We need to learn with immigrants, refugees, landless people how they eat and what the kingdom of God means by having nothing but giving everything. Around this meal, the food that is eaten has to be simple because we must leave soon. Together we multiply our 5 loaves of bread and two fishes. We remember the moving tabernacle in the desert with the tents for refugee camps, the temporary shrines made by immigrants in the desert, and the notion of sanctuary movements.

Around the table, Santa Ana reminds us of four important things: First, we remember Jesus Christ who is the reason of our eating together. Second, this faith around the table teaches us the meaning of the word *companion*, from the Latin word *cum et panis*, friendship around bread. Third, this faith around this table teaches us that we are to become disciples of Jesus and follow a hard path. Even the disciples saw how hard it was to listen to Jesus words and follow him.<sup>38</sup> "When many of his disciples heard it, they said, 'This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?'"<sup>39</sup> To be a follower of Jesus is to engage with the anamnesis of Jesus, his life and ministry and fight for a new world that was lived and preached by Jesus. For the memory of Jesus is duly connected with the militant testimony of the Kingdom of God. Fourth, and lastly, we are to learn to be thankful since the Eucharist is an enactment of thanksgiving.<sup>40</sup>

The sharing of food is the invitation and bond of friendship; the love of God around the table, a demand to care, to love and to share. At the table we meet Jesus in each other.

"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."<sup>41</sup> There is no spirit if not in the body; to eat and to drink, touch and taste, feel and smell, all the sensualities around the table; a faith sensed in and through the body. Food and drink are material exchanges in holy grounds. As Nancy Cardoso Pereira says:

To eat and to drink, basic acts of exchange with the world: Oikoumene. To eat and to drink are fundamental representations of belonging... Food reveals a way of being in the world, to establish exchanges in an occupied territory, organize the labor. To eat is to make culture as permanence, capacity to adapt and be creative. In a meal, any meal, people participate ritually in the access of a whole process of production and reproduction at the same time of the conditions of material as well as symbolic life. Many of the sacred feasts celebrate the harvest and perform the distribution of food and its consumption. In the ritual, through the food and drink of the festivity, the social group appropriates its harvest as product and possibility to consume. Work and festivities.<sup>42</sup>

Special food and diets are demanded for each religious ritual, indicating a norm around which life is organized, a way of giving shape to the cycle of life from planting the seeds, harvesting, production, consumption and new seeds to be planted again. It is important to relate

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<sup>37</sup> SANTA ANA, 1986, p. 37.

<sup>38</sup> SANTA ANA, 1986, p. 91.

<sup>39</sup> John 6: 60, *Holy Bible*, NRSV.

<sup>40</sup> Julio de Santa Ana, *Pão, Vinho e Amizade. Meditações.*, op.cit., 91-93

<sup>41</sup> John 6: 57, *Holy Bible*, NRSV.

<sup>42</sup> PEREIRA, Nancy Cardoso. *A alegria é a prova das nove*. Antropofagia e ecumenismo, 2012. Not published.

the Pentecost to the Eucharist as the celebration of seeds/harvesting with the new life springing forth that will be continued in the sharing of food around the table.

Thus our Eucharistic eating lays out and represents a form of society, and the ways in which we organize the cycle of life, who is part of it or not. To remember Jesus as bread and wine, wheat and grapes, is to remember our beginning, coming from *humus*, ashes, remembering that we are guided by the “slow” pace of the earth and not the super fast pace of post-modernity.

Our Eucharist is a regular daily life meal. It is our daily eating, our common coffee mugs, our shared rice and beans, the sacramentality of our lives.<sup>43</sup> But the Eucharist is also a unique meal in a special time where we gather with special food, cloths and symbols. And we are in the midst of these two meals, feeding each other, mixing up the elements of both meals, pedestrian words with special words, some things to remember and other things remembered randomly, one serving another without any kind of religious, class, gender or sexual distinction, or even special cloths, until we can’t distinguish which one is what, thus all gaining the possibility of sacramentality, the locus of God’s presence.

At the table, quotidian love in the passing of the bread, lots of affections as one looks into another’s eyes to receive the wine, tenderness in sharing the butter, hospitality that squeezes over offering a seat for the new comer. The enemy is fed, capitalism turned into shared means, friendships discovered and hunger an issue of the past. At the table, survival of endangered groups, sharing of old symbols and creation of many new ones, where food and eating are part of the same erotic/sensual process. At the table, the distinction of foods for each social group draws the possibilities and the limits of contact/contagion and the ways around it. An unending negotiation for a diverse life to happen. The walls of distinction between one group and another become bridges of connection and movements towards one other. Identities marked and constantly remade. Recipes shared, some gone wrong until we learn, trying the feast of the global cuisine and sacramental food around different eating practices. I eat your food, you eat mine and we expand our diets, our religious tastes and our abilities to offer hospitality and stay connected with one another.

However, if hunger lingers around the table, if violence surmounts the bearable, survival becomes the way to live, and we becoming estranged, let our practice of the sacrament of eucharist bring us back to the place where we denounce the endangering of the social threads of life that keep us together, and allow the deterioration of the capacity to reproduce the symbols of life and share the production of our labor. When the basic needs of the body are not met, the community embraces the frail bodies in order to be cared for, treated, brought home, mended, healed, fed, sang to, danced and laughed with so as to get it ready again to go back out into the perils and graces of life. Friendships to be honored! All the way! With forgiveness that never ceases to be offered and allows life to be lived again at any time.

When the Bishop of São Felix do Araguaia, MT in Brazil, Pedro Casaldáliga, was called into the Vatican for the regular *ad limina* visits of Bishops, Liberation theologies were at their peak in Latin America. In the interview to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith where Joseph Ratzinger was its Prefect, he says he was accused of celebrating the Eucharist as a social rite only and his response was:

I doubt I can be accused of this reductionism. Precisely, I have the custom of explaining the mass by saying ‘Passover of Jesus, our Passover, Passover of the world.’ Death and life,

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<sup>43</sup> BOFF, Leonardo. *Sacraments of Life: Life of the Sacraments*. Portland: Pastoral Press, 1987.

passion and resurrection. When I present the host to the Eucharistic congregation I say 'this is the lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world.' We talk about the passion, death and resurrection of each one of us and the people, that is for sure. That is why we have the Eucharist. In order to have life Christ gave his own life to us. Traditionally the church makes us repeat in the offertory 'fruit of the earth and labor of people.' There is something social in this earth and labor. I reminded them of the Mass of the Land Without Evil, The Mass of the Quilombos, that the Vatican prohibited, and tried to defend it. I told Cardinal Gantin from Africa of the importance of The Mass of the Quilombos because of the black people and how much it cost for the church to inculturate itself and I reclaim the right of other cultures of our third world.<sup>44</sup>

I claim this same argument from Bishop Casaldáliga to say that I do not want the sacrament to be "just" a social rite. It is way more than that. Taking Augustine's question from his Confessions: "What do I love when I love my God", I hope everybody at the table will ask: *Who Do We Remember When We Remember Jesus in this Meal?* Who is there? We don't remember a ghost in this meal but the real presence of Jesus Christ, torn, beaten up, ridiculed, violated, crucified on a cross of shame. And we remember those who are still being torn, beaten up, ridiculed, violated, and crucified on contemporary crosses of shame, oppression, hunger and social invisibility. And "We talk about the passion, death and resurrection of each one of us and the people, that is for sure." So we honor Christ as we honor each other. We take each other from the crosses of our society and in Jesus' name, we honor the dispossessed with gladness.

Around this table, neither food nor housing is a privilege. It is a right! Given by God! The people's movements in Brazil say this: "if to have a house is a right, to occupy is a duty." So we will occupy all of the Eucharistic tables, all of the country club tables, all of the private tables that do not share their food so everyone will have something to eat! To be in solidarity with the poor is not only standing at their side but engaging in movements of justice and transformation. Let us occupy all of the tables across the world and demand food for all, so that all will be fed by the grace of God!

## Conclusion

It was the Ukrainian-Brazilian poet/writer Clarice Lispector who said that love is bread amidst strangers. Getting together and feeding each other breaks the ties of hatred and builds connections of support and strength. Lispector says:

It was a harvesting gathering, we were eating and we ceased the truce. As a horde of living creatures, gradually covering the earth. Occupied as those who plow the existence, mining and planting, harvesting, killing, living, and dying. I ate with the honesty of those who do not deceive the eating: I ate that food and not its name. Never was God so consumed so fully by what God is. The food was saying rude, happy, austere: eat, eat and share. It all belonged to me, that was my father's table. I ate without tenderness, without the passion of piety. And without offering myself hope. I ate without any nostalgia. And I was worthy of that food. Because I cannot always be my brother's keeper, and I cannot be my own keeper, oh I don't desire myself anymore. And I do not want to form life, because it already exists. It exists as a ground where we all move forward. Without a word of love.

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<sup>44</sup> CASALDÁLIGA Pedro. *Cartas Marcadas*. São Paulo: Paulus, 2005. p. 27.

Without a word. But your desire understands my pleasure. We are strong and we eat. Bread is love amidst strangers.<sup>45</sup>

We shouldn't even need God to tell us to offer and partake of our food. But because God knew we wouldn't be prone to do that, God gave Godself in Jesus to tell us what to be human was all about. In Jesus, our desires are understood and our needs fulfilled. Through Jesus, our shared love will know each other's pleasures and needs, and we will move forward, together. It does not matter if you are like me, if you believe something else, if you are baptized or not, or even if you are from another religion. The Eucharistic table is a space for this radical gathering together, this global communion in the *oikos* of God, gathering strangers under this very strange unconditional love of God who loves us all and provides us the means for us to provide to each other. Because the providence of God only happens in and through each other. The itinerary of God's love surpasses our theologies and proper beliefs. One thing we can affirm: God's love is bread, and wine, amidst strangers, food for the material and spiritually hungry. The Eucharist as a whole meal, prepared for all who come until we can't distinguish the names of what is the food pantry and what is the Eucharistic meal: I ate that food and not its name. Never was God so consumed by what God is...

At the table we give glory to God, loving God and our neighbors with honor and blessings. This honoring one another under God's preferential option for the poor helps undo the systems of death and strengthen us to fight against systems of injustice. The holy meals in our society are like lighthouses for ships in the midst of the sea, giving light and direction, announcing a place to be for all who are dismissed from our societies. In and through the Eucharistic prayer we live out the gospel of Jesus Christ in its fullness.

We remind ourselves that we are committed to a faith that is an action! We don't buy into a consumerist faith, we don't turn Jesus' cross into lollipops, but use this cross to strengthen our work! We share our resources, we make sure everybody around the table has housing and medical assistance. We lift up the names of women violated throughout the world, we have our kids playing around each other, we tend to each other's wounds and needs, we dance and we celebrate. We collect each other's tears and we offer them together to God. We hold each other accountable and we turn the meager Eucharistic meal into a full banquet for anyone who hungers.

And at the church door sign, we name this holy meal this way:

*Come to today's meal, prepared for you. Come without money or proper baptismal certificate. Today there is a holy meal given by Jesus Christ for anyone who comes. Those who are hungry will have preferred seats and will eat first: the poor, the unnamed, the undocumented, the foreign, the hurt, the stranger, the women, the children, the beggars, those without health insurance, those unemployed, without a place to sleep. If you are from another faith, teach us to pray your prayer and come eat with us! But be careful! If you participate, you will have to share what you have so no one will go hungry. That is the rule of our maker, liberator and consoler. Make sure you know that! And if you call the police because this is scary to you, we will welcome the police too! But before you come in, go out and bring all of the beggars of the nations! Especially, go get those who nobody sees, those who are humiliated in our society, theirs, theirs is this table of food and the kingdom of God! Please bring them! Without them we will not be well. Strangers, we are all strangers! And this table has bread to be shared among strangers! All of us*

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<sup>45</sup> LISPECTOR, Clarice. *A Repartição dos Pães*. Disponível em: <[www.releituras.com/clispector\\_paes.asp](http://www.releituras.com/clispector_paes.asp)>. Acesso em: 28 jul. 2015.

*human/soil/humus, living in humility. We all belonging to God and even if you don't want to belong to God come! Bring the kids and the elderly. Let us wait until they arrive. Let the sound of the children be our first Gloria! Let the small voice of our elderly be the shout of God in our midst! In the name of Jesus the feast of God is now ready for all who are hungry, for all who know that we must hang out together in our differences and complexities! Our mission is to cook for and serve you. But we will be glad to use your condiments as well, and you can cook for us as well, if you want. We will pray each other's prayers, we will sing each other's songs, we will embrace your sons and daughters and we will hear your stories. Amidst holy things and things yet to be holy, we eat, until we make the world a holy ground of justice where all people are considered holy, made in the image of God, with dignity and honor! Joy to the world! We are thankful friends! We are thankful!*

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