

# “From the open side of the Lord”: on Joseph Ratzinger’s eucharistic ecclesiology

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My immediate acceptance of the invitation to contribute to this group of essays in honour of Professor George Grima had various motivations. “Dun George”, as we past students affectionately call him, has not only induced us in theology as a Dean of the Faculty and Lecturer of Moral Theology, but also instilled in us an unrelenting sense to seek convergence among the contrasting lines of thought under study. His mark on the Faculty is certainly his determination to adopt and to exercise an interdisciplinary approach in theology in order to ensure a safe path to seek the truth. Furthermore, what strikes me in Professor Grima is his sense of readiness and ability to make his interlocutors feel welcome and attended to at any time regardless of all other pressing commitments.

What I shall be presenting here, is a modest reflection on the Church in the thought of Joseph Ratzinger (1927–).<sup>1</sup> It is my hope that this paper somehow evokes Professor Grima’s wit in providing food for thought to countless students at the University of Malta and elsewhere, as well as his inimitable joyful character who has led his regular listeners, parishioners, and friends grow in their faith while seeking understanding. My aim is to examine Ratzinger’s claim that a proper understanding of the Church is obtained from the standpoint of her liturgy.<sup>2</sup> In

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- 1 For a deeper examination of the topic, see John Anthony Berry, *The Origin and the Nature of the Church in the Life and Writings of Joseph Ratzinger* (STL diss., Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome, 2006).
  - 2 See Joseph Ratzinger, *God and the World* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2002), 343. For a solid and a comprehensive introduction to the thought of Joseph Ratzinger, see Lieven Boeve and Gerard Mannion, *The Ratzinger Reader* (London: T&T Clark, 2010); John C. Cavadini,

this sense, while some people have the temptation to make her handier and more practical, to some extent make her a human construction, the Church must purely be experienced and thought of as a mystery emanating from God himself. This is not to say that there is no human or practical side to it.

In contrast to some of his contemporaries, Ratzinger's theological reflection on the Church is distinctive for his effort to avoid all dualisms in its understanding. He shows a complete sense of disagreement to descriptions of the Church that seem to be one-sided. For instance, against the emphasis of Hans Küng (1928–) that the Church is basically a human fellowship radically in need of structural reform, Ratzinger would definitely direct his strong focus on Christ and the Church as the channels of God's grace to the world. The same would apply to the liberation theologian Leonardo Boff (1938–) whose ecclesiology is characterized by an "orthopraxis" that precedes orthodoxy. Instead of an over-emphasis or an one-sidedness, Ratzinger seeks synthesis. This applies in particular to the definition of the Church as the "People of God" and as the "Body of Christ", images used at the Second Vatican Council.

The Church, he says, is "the People of God by virtue of the Body of Christ."<sup>3</sup> In this regard, Ratzinger points out that the key-idea, which best enables us to understand the Church of Jesus Christ, as revelation presents her to humanity, is the Eucharist.<sup>4</sup> Put briefly and almost paradoxically: it is by eating the Body of Christ that God's people become the Body of Christ. The establishment of the new covenant and the bringing of the New People of God into being is therefore a manifestation of the supreme love by which Christ sacrificed himself on the behalf of humanity.

By privileging the relation of the Eucharist to the Church, Ratzinger provides then a key to understand his ecclesiological writings. His approach evidences his inclination to integrate the mentioned conciliar images as to present a "eucharistic ecclesiology."<sup>5</sup> He explains that this understanding of the Church surpasses what he calls an oscillation between a stress on the Church's visible, external side and an emphasis on her contrasting invisible, interior aspect.<sup>6</sup> Eucharistic ecclesiology,

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*Explorations in the Theology of Benedict XVI* (Notre Dame/IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012); Maximilian Heinrich Heim, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church and Living Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2007); and Aidan Nichols, *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI: An Introduction to the Theology of Joseph Ratzinger* (London: T&T Clark, 2007).

3 Joseph Ratzinger, *Nuovo Popolo di Dio* (Brescia: Queriniana, 1971), 97.

4 For Ratzinger, the centrality of the Eucharist lies in fashioning Christ's body. The same idea is presented in Luke's words: "This is my body which is given for you" and again "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood", Lk 22:19-20.

5 Joseph Ratzinger, "Conference of Cardinal Ratzinger at the opening of the Pastoral Congress of the Diocese of Aversa (Italy)", *L'Osservatore Romano*, English ed. (23 January 2002): 5-8.

6 See Joseph Ratzinger, *Popolo e Casa di Dio in Sant' Agostino* (Milano: Jaca Book, 2005), 77.

therefore, focuses on Christ as the one who willed to found the Church as well as the one who nourishes and builds her up in the Spirit. The Eucharist, therefore, is understood entirely in a dynamic ecclesiological perspective.

The Church is indivisible from the Eucharist. One presupposes the other, and neither can exist without the other. So, while the Church can be defined as eucharistic in nature, equally true is the affirmation that the Eucharist emerges as the heart of the Church's life. His aim is to steer away from possibly misleading terms, even biblical ones – that could be simply read in sociological terms – and rather to identify in Jesus of Nazareth the true foundation and life of the Church. As shall be seen later on in this study, Ratzinger explains that the origin and nature of the Church are to be interpreted through a closer rereading of the narrative of the institution of the Eucharist as part of the passion narratives. In this light, what constitutes the “heart of the Church” is the Eucharist. It is the Eucharist, then, the source through which one can experience and live in communion with God and fellow humans.

While Ratzinger presents a eucharistic ecclesiology, not only must one pay attention to complement a sociological interpretation of the Church with Revelation as a dogmatic truth, but also to identify and distinguish among the various levels that are at play in speaking of a eucharistic ecclesiology. What is examined here is the relation of the Eucharist to the Church in the light of Christ, the sacraments and the Christian life. The primary level, then, is *Christological*. This means that in Christ, particularly shedding his life on the cross, the Church has its foundation and life in the world. The second level is a *sacramental* one, where the believing Christian community gathers around one altar to celebrate the breaking of the bread and to live in communion with each other. The third level is the *existential* one where belonging to the Church implies bearing witness, leading a Christian life, and being of service to others in the community and in the world. Our aim here is to elucidate the importance and complementarity of each dimension of Ratzinger's eucharistic ecclesiology after having presented his understanding that ecclesial communion has its centre in the Eucharist.

## 1. The Eucharist as the Heart of the Church

Having so much at heart the epigraph *Unus panis, unum corpus sumus multi* – “We who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread”<sup>7</sup> – for his dissertation *People of God and House of God in Augustine’s Doctrine of the Church*, Ratzinger explains that, what happens in the Eucharist is the uniting of Christians. The Eucharist, therefore, can be understood entirely in a dynamic ecclesiological perspective. The Eucharist, in this sense, brings Christians from their state of separation into the unity of the one bread and the one body.<sup>8</sup> He writes:

The Church is eucharistic fellowship. She is not just a people: out of the many people of which she consists there is arising one people, through the one table that the Lord has spread for us all. The Church is, so to speak, a network of eucharistic fellowships, and she is united, ever and again, through the one body we all receive.<sup>9</sup>

In a lecture on the doctrine of the Eucharist held in the summer of 1963, Ratzinger explained that Augustine, in a sermon for those newly baptised at the Easter Vigil,<sup>10</sup> presented a key sentence from the First Letter to the Corinthians to explain what the Eucharist is. According to Augustine (354–430 A.D.), in one sentence, there is the whole mystery of what the newly baptised are receiving:

It needs to be made clear to you what it is that you have received. Hear briefly, then, what the apostle – or, rather, Christ through the apostle – says about the sacrament of the Body of the Lord. “We who are many are one Body, ... one Bread.” Behold, that is all; I have told it to you quickly; but weigh these words, do not count them!<sup>11</sup>

Here the main emphasis of the Eucharist becomes apparent. The Eucharist, therefore, is instrumental in the process by which Christ builds himself a body and makes all Christians into one single bread, one single body. It is the living process through which, time and again, the Church’s activity of becoming the Church takes

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7 1 Cor 10:17.

8 See Joseph Ratzinger, *God is near us* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2003), 114.

9 *Ibid.*, 115.

10 See Augustine, “Tractatus de dominica sanctae Paschae”, in *Miscellanea Agostiniana*, I, ed. Germain Morin (Roma: Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, 1930), I:462-464, as quoted in Ratzinger, *God is near us*, 114.

11 Ratzinger, *God is near us*, 114.

place.<sup>12</sup> Ratzinger insists that the Eucharist is never an event involving just two, a dialogue between Christ and the believer. He writes:

The Church originates, and has her continuing existence, in the Lord's communicating himself to men, entering into communion with them, and thus bringing them into communion with one another. The Church is the Lord's communion with us, which at the same time brings about the true communication of men with one another.<sup>13</sup>

Aidan Nichols (1948–) comments that in looking at this understanding of the Eucharist and the Church, a continuous and unbroken line of development from the time before the Council up to the present day is evident. He holds that, while Ratzinger's publications and addresses bear witness to this, his eucharistic ecclesiology even found its way into the texts of the Council. However, Ratzinger was not the only one who promoted this type of ecclesiology. Interest was awakened in the twentieth century among both Catholic and Orthodox theologians.<sup>14</sup> On the Orthodox side, one has the example of such recent authors as Nikolai Afanas'ev (1893–1966), George Florovsky (1893–1979), Paul Evdokimov (1901–1970) and John Meyendorff (1926–1992), all theologians of the Russian Diaspora, as well as the Greek theologian John Zizioulas (1931–). On the Catholic side, outstanding names include the Jesuit Cardinal Henri de Lubac (1896–1991), the Oratorian Louis Bouyer (1913–2004), the Dominican Yves Congar (1904–1995), and the Benedictine Emmanuel Lanne (1923–2010), monk of Chevetogne.<sup>15</sup>

Nichols remarks that the achievement of twentieth-century eucharistic theology is simply the retrieval of what was best in the eucharistic doctrine of the preceding nineteen centuries. "The twentieth century theologians recovered

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12 See *ibid.*, 115; Hector Scerri, *Koinonia, Diakonia and Martyria: Interrelated Themes in Patristic Sacramental Theology as Expounded by Adalbert-G. Hamman O.F.M.*, Melita Theologica Supplementary Series 4 (Malta: Foundation for Theological Studies, 1999), 111-159.

13 Joseph Ratzinger, "Gemeinde aus der Eucharistie", in *Vom Wiederauffinden der Mitte. Grundorientierungen. Texte aus vier Jahrzehnten*, ed. Joseph Kardinal Ratzinger, Stephan Otto Horn, Vinzenz Pfnür et al. (Freiburg: Herder, 1997), 35, as quoted in Ratzinger, *God is near us*, 7.

14 Nichols comments that it was scarcely a coincidence, therefore, that the first meeting of the Orthodox-Catholic ecumenical commission, established in 1980, should have taken as its theme, "The Mystery of the Church and the Eucharist in the Light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity." The original (French) text can be found in *Irénikon* 55 (1982): 350-362. See Aidan Nichols, *The Holy Eucharist* (Dublin: Veritas, 1991), 107.

15 References to the work of these men can be found in Aidan Nichols' *Theology in the Russian Diaspora. Church, Fathers, Eucharist in Nikolai Afanas'ev 1891-1966* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), chapter 6.

the themes of eucharistic theology<sup>16</sup> already well established before the twentieth century opened and inter-related them in a way that was intellectually coherent, theologically balanced, and preachable.”<sup>17</sup> Nichols notes that the motif of the Eucharist-Church connection ceased to be marginalized only with the rise of the “liturgical movement” in the early twentieth century. He refers to what an observer lamented on the eve of the Great War, saying:

Contemporary authors seem not to have attached much importance to this unitive power of the Eucharist. If *L'Année Liturgique* and a few occasional mystical writings had not taken care to relaunch it into circulation, it ... would have become, in our time, a forgotten doctrine.<sup>18</sup>

The prime exponent of the remarkable revival of eucharistic ecclesiology in twentieth-century theology was certainly Afanas'ev.<sup>19</sup> It is particularly significant that Vatican II endorsed it and had it written clearly in its statements. Hence, the Eucharist is described as the source and summit (*fons et culmen*) of the whole Christian life<sup>20</sup> and a principal manifestation of the Church.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, the rediscovery of a eucharistic ecclesiology, though of undoubted value, has sometimes placed one-sided emphasis on the principle of the local Church. In this regard, Ratzinger notes that Vatican II was aware of the concerns of both Orthodox and Protestant theology and tried to integrate them into a more ample Catholic understanding.<sup>22</sup>

Afanas'ev, then writing in Paris, argued that the Church is fully realized in the local worshipping community, where the sacrament is celebrated.<sup>23</sup> It is claimed that where the Eucharist is celebrated, the totality of the mystery of the Church would be made present in such a way as to render any other principle of unity or universality inessential.<sup>24</sup> He writes:

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16 These include the Eucharist as foundation of the Church; the real presence and its rationale or purposes; and the real sacrifice and its benefits.

17 Aidan Nichols, *The Holy Eucharist*, 102.

18 J. Simon, “L'Eucharistie, sacrement de l'unité”, *Revue Thomiste* 20 (1912): 583-4.

19 After studying science in Russia, Afanas'ev turned to theology, became a priest, and in 1930 a professor at the Orthodox Institute of St Sergius founded by Russian émigrés in Paris in 1925. He studied canon law, Church history and patristics. However, his theological thrust could be seen in his Eucharistic ecclesiology.

20 See Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, n.11.

21 See Vatican Council II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n.41.

22 See Joseph Ratzinger, “The Ecclesiology of Vatican II”, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, English ed. (23 January 2002): 6.

23 See Nikolai Afanas'ev, “Una Sancta”, *Irénikon* 36 (1963): 436-75, esp. 452-54; see Paul McPartlan, *The Eucharist Makes the Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 98-120.

24 Such a view is criticized by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion (*Communio notio*)”, n.11. See *Origins* 22 (25 June 1992):

Where there is a eucharistic assembly, there is the Church. The Church cannot exist without a eucharistic assembly; and the eucharistic assembly cannot but manifest the plenitude and the unity of the Church. Hence the structure and the order of the Church come from the eucharistic assembly, which contains the whole basis of ecclesial organisation.<sup>25</sup>

Uninterested in the communion among all members of Christ's Church and among particular churches, Afanas'ev saw no theological justification for overarching structures of unity. Conversely, the logic of his argument implied that the pastor of every parish is equal to the bishop in authority.<sup>26</sup> Ratzinger explains that in Orthodox theology as such, the idea of eucharistic ecclesiology was first expressed by exiled Russian theologians in opposition to the pretensions of Roman centralism. He writes:

They affirmed that insofar as it possesses Christ entirely, every Eucharistic community is already, in se, the Church. Consequently, external unity with other communities is not a constitutive element of the Church. Therefore, they concluded that unity with Rome is not a constitutive element of the Church. Such a unity would be a beautiful thing since it would represent the fullness of Christ to the external world, but it is not essential since nothing would be added to the totality of Christ.<sup>27</sup>

Afanas'ev did not deny that the Eucharist must be Catholic, but he defined the catholicity of the Church in a qualitative sense as meaning her full reality. He bases his rejection of a universalist ecclesiology on the implications of New Testament texts on the local Church which Cyprian drew out and on the remark of Ignatius of Antioch: "where Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church."<sup>28</sup>

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108-12, at 110.

25 Nikolai Afanas'ev, *L'Église du Saint-Esprit, Cogitatio fidei* 83 (Paris: Cerf, 1975), 196, as quoted by Christopher O'Donnell, "Nikolai Afanas'ev," in *Ecclesia*, ed. Christopher O'Donnell (Collegeville/MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 3.

26 Though Afanas'ev strongly emphasized the role and ministry of the one who presides at the Eucharist, he did not accept any other power or exercise of authority over the Eucharistic community. His insistence on love as the only bond between communities involves a rejection of a full notion of hierarchy, a point for which he has been criticized by both Orthodox and Catholic writers. See Nikolai Afanas'ev, "The Ministry of the Laity in the Church", *Ecumenical Review* 10 (1957-1958) 255-263; and his article, "The Church which presides in Love", in *The Primacy of Peter*, ed. John Meyendorff et al. (London: Faith, 1963), 57-110; see also Battista Mondin, *Le Nuove ecclesologie* (Rome: Paoline, 1980), 238-248.

27 Ratzinger, "The Ecclesiology of Vatican II", 6.

28 Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Smyrnaens* 8, 2, in *The Anti-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander

In a lecture entitled “A Eucharistic Church: The Vision of John Paul II,” Avery Dulles remarks that Afanas’ev does not represent the consensus of Orthodox theologians. According to Dulles, several prominent Orthodox colleagues, including John Meyendorff and John Zizioulas, have corrected his view of catholicity.<sup>29</sup> Zizioulas, for instance, insists that according to the will of Christ, the Church is a communion not only in a given locality, but throughout the world. The Eucharist by its nature expresses and solidifies communion among churches, all of which strengthen one another by their complementary gifts and mutual support. Thus, according to Zizioulas, the unity binds all particular churches or eucharistic communities together into a harmonious reciprocity.<sup>30</sup>

Afanas’ev’s error has also been repeated by some Catholic theologians who have been accused by some of having espoused a Marxist orientation. In his book *Ecclesio genesis*, the Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff maintained that the Church is not constituted hierarchically from above, rather, it “reinvents” itself from below, by the action of Christians at the “base.”<sup>31</sup> Following a similar logic, some European Catholics like Edward Schillebeeckx (1914–2009) and Josef Blank (1926–), hold that any local community has from Christ, who is present in it, the power to constitute itself as a Church and to produce its own Eucharist.<sup>32</sup> These sometimes argue that every local community has a right to the Eucharist, and from this they deduce the power of the congregation to designate one of its own members to preside at Mass.

With regard to the classical Lutheran Protestant understanding of the Church, Ratzinger holds that likewise, this particular theology was moving in the same direction as that of Afanas’ev. Ratzinger affirms that since Luther replaced the word “Church” with “community” (*Gemeinde*), for him, the Church became a negative concept. Luther, therefore could no longer recognize the Spirit of Christ in the universal Church. Ratzinger explains that for Luther only the assembly that listens to the Word of God in a specific place is the Church. For him, the Church existed in

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Roberts, James Donaldson (Grand Rapids/MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 90.

29 Avery Dulles, “A Eucharistic Church: The Vision of John Paul II,” (online): <http://americamagazine.org/issue/513/article/eucharistic-church> [accessed 30 May 2015]. See John Meyendorff, *Orthodoxy and Catholicity* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1966), 157-60; John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (London: Longman, Darton and Todd, 1985), 23-25, 132-33, 155-58. Meyendorff, in his foreword to this book, expresses his agreement with Zizioulas against Afanas’ev.

30 See John Anthony Berry, “Communion Ecclesiology in Theological Ecumenism”, in *Questions Liturgiques/Studies in Liturgy* 90/2-3 (2009): 92-105.

31 See Leonardo Boff, *Ecclesio genesis: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church* (New York: Orbis and Maryknoll, 1986), 1-2.

32 Ratzinger particularly criticizes Joseph Blank and Edward Schillebeeckx for asserting the right of the community to appoint one of its own member to preside at the Eucharist. See Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1987), 285-287; Boff, *Ecclesio genesis*, 61-75.



the community. Conversely, this leads one to say that the Protestant State churches of the Reformation, in Luther's understanding, were only social, political entities necessary for specific purposes and dependent on political powers – nothing more.<sup>33</sup>

Against errors such as these, Ratzinger has strongly reasserted the classical doctrine of the catholicity of the Eucharist. Since catholicity is an "inner dimension" of the Eucharist, no particular Church can bestow upon itself the power to perform the eucharistic sacrifice.<sup>34</sup> Ratzinger asserts that the local community becomes a Church only by being received into the universal Church, which is the Body of Christ, who is one and indivisible.<sup>35</sup> Thus, ecclesial communion has its centre in the Eucharist. In other words, whereas Baptism is an initial incorporation into the body which is built up, the body is vivified through the Eucharist.<sup>36</sup>

A eucharistic ecclesiology, however, does not mean that everything in the Church can be derived from the Eucharist. In the course of his ecclesiological writings, Ratzinger refers to the statement of Cardinal Henri de Lubac, "the Eucharist builds the Church and the Church makes the Eucharist."<sup>37</sup> Here, the lines of causality run in both directions. Neither is absolutely prior to the other, but each was founded by Christ with a view to the other. Unless there were a Church, there would be no one to celebrate the Eucharist, but unless there were a Eucharist, the Church would lack the supreme source of her vitality.

In the Catholic tradition, Ratzinger identifies de Lubac as the one, who through his work of imposing a comprehensive scholarship, has demonstrated that the expression *corpus mysticum* was originally used in reference to the Eucharist.<sup>38</sup> He brings to life the half-forgotten connection between the Church

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33 See Ratzinger, "The Ecclesiology of Vatican II", 5.

34 Ratzinger explains that the Eucharistic Prayers of the Roman Missal make it clear that every legitimate Eucharist is celebrated in union with the whole body of bishops and the Pope, for otherwise it would be deficient in Catholicity. A Eucharist celebrated in separation from the college of bishops and the faithful of their churches would lack the attribute of Catholicity.

35 See 1 Cor 1:13; Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 293. The Church of the first centuries was acutely conscious of the Eucharist as a bond among churches. In the diocese of Rome there was a practice of sending a fragment of the consecrated host from the bishop's church to outlying parish churches to signify the unity between the Eucharist celebrated by the presbyters and his own. When bishops came on visits, the local bishop would often invite them to concelebrate with them. The faithful of such churches received Eucharistic hospitality as a sign of communion. The refusal to recognize a church led inevitably to a refusal to participate in its Eucharistic celebrations or to let its member participate in one's own Eucharist. See Ludwig Hertling, *Communio: Church and Papacy in Early Christianity* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1972), 23-28.

36 Many of these ideas are reaffirmed by the official teaching of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. As prefect of that Congregation, Cardinal Ratzinger in 1992 issued an important "Instruction on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion."

37 Henri de Lubac, *The Splendour of the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986), 134.

38 See Joseph Ratzinger, *Co-Workers of the Truth* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992), 324; Scerri, *Koinonia, Diakonia and Martyria*, 120-121.

and the Eucharist, the heart of the Church. The Church “produces the Eucharist, but the Eucharist also produces the Church.”<sup>39</sup> “The eucharistic mystery necessarily extends into that of the Church,”<sup>40</sup> which is “indispensable to the fulfilling of the eucharistic mystery.”<sup>41</sup> “It is in the Eucharist that the mysterious essence of the Church receives a perfect expression.”<sup>42</sup> De Lubac explained that, for Saint Paul as well as for the Fathers of the Church, the concept of the Church as the Body of Christ was inseparably linked to the concept of the Eucharist, in which the incarnate Lord is truly present and gives us his Body to be our food.<sup>43</sup>

Ratzinger insists that the authentic occasion of the founding of the Church is recognized in the Last Supper. What was initiated in signs in the covenant of Mount Sinai, Jesus at the Last Supper completes to the full reality – a union of blood and life between God and mankind. Ratzinger explains that Jesus bestows on his own this liturgy of his death and Resurrection and, in doing so, bestows on them also the feast of life.<sup>44</sup> He writes:

When we say this, it is clear that the Last Supper anticipates both Cross and Resurrection yet at the same time necessarily presumes them. For otherwise everything would be but an empty gesture. That is why the Fathers of the Church could say, in a very beautiful image, that the Church sprang from the open side of the Lord, from which there flowed blood and water. That is, in reality, only another way of formulating the thought I express when I say: the Last Supper is the beginning of the Church. For it always means that the Eucharist unites humankind not only with one another, but with Christ and so constitutes humanity as the Church, thus giving, at the same time, the basic constitution of the Church. The Church lives in eucharistic communities. Her liturgy is her constitution, for it is, of its very nature, service of God and, therefore, service of humanity, service for the transformation of the world.<sup>45</sup>

By immersing herself in the Eucharist, the Church takes on then the characteristics of that great mystery of faith. This idea is clearly expressed in the words of *Lumen Gentium*, n. 26: “In receiving Holy Communion we let Christ into our hearts to make them like his own.” Similarly, the Catholic tradition

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39 De Lubac, *The Splendour of the Church* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1956), 27; *Catholicism* (London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1950), 17.

40 De Lubac, *The Splendour of the Church*, 25-26.

41 De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 187.

42 Henri de Lubac, *Mémoire sur l'occasion de mes écrits* (Namur: Culture et Vie, 1989), 175.

43 See Ratzinger, *Co-Workers of the Truth*, 324.

44 See *ibid.*

45 *Ibid.*, 325.

applies to the Eucharist the famous passage from Augustine in which Christ is depicted as saying: "I am your food, but instead of my being changed into you, it is you who will be transformed into me."<sup>46</sup> Christians, in this sense, do not transform their nourishment into themselves, but they are transformed into it. This transformation, therefore, means concretely that the ideas, attitudes, and sentiments of all the faithful are remoulded in the likeness of those of Jesus Christ as he gives himself to them in loving obedience to his Father's command. It is in this way that the Church becomes eucharistic. Having examined Ratzinger's interest in the revival of eucharistic ecclesiology in twentieth-century theology, let us now pass on to speak about the three levels that describe the relation of the Eucharist to the Church; the first being the foundation of Ratzinger's eucharistic Theology.

## 2. The Centrality of the Cross in Eucharistic Theology

Before speaking of the sacramental dimension of the Church, Ratzinger deems it important to establish the basis of eucharistic ecclesiology. He explains that the inner presupposition of all Eucharistic theology is represented in the interpretation of Christ's death on the Cross in terms of the cult.<sup>47</sup> Ratzinger explains that Paul could describe Christ as *hilasterion*, which in the cultic terminology of the Old Testament meant the centre of the temple, the cover that lay upon the ark, only insofar as Jesus himself had anticipated his own death at the Last Supper.<sup>48</sup> Christ, therefore, had gone through it in advance and transformed it from within into an event of self-sacrifice and love. Making use of older pre-Pauline formulas in Rom 3:24-26, Paul has put together the fundamental text for this interpretation.<sup>49</sup>

Ratzinger explains that even though human cults, including that of the Old Testament, are mere "images", foreshadowing the real worship of God, the cult was not abolished by Christ. Ratzinger holds that modern exegesis, in its spiritualizing reinterpretation of the old cult, has misinterpreted Christ as the

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46 Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 7, Chapter 10, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody/MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 109.

47 See *ibid.*

48 Ratzinger explains that *hilasterion*, the Greek word for *kapporeth*, was seen as the place above which Yahweh appeared in a cloud. Referring to the studies of the biblical exegetes Gese and Lang, Ratzinger explains that this *kapporeth* used to be sprinkled with the blood from expiatory sacrifices, in order that God might thus come as close as possible. See Hartmut Gese, *Zur biblischen Theologie: Alttestamentliche Vorträge* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1977), 85-106, esp. 105 f.; B. Lang, "kipphaer-kapporaet," in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, IV, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Stuttgart: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984), 303-318, as quoted in Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 95.

49 See Heinrich Schlier, *Der Römerbrief* (Freiburg: Herder, 1977), 106-116, as quoted by Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 95.

real place of atonement, the true *kapporeth*. Ratzinger argues that with Jesus, the intent and purpose of the feast of atonement becomes a reality. For Paul, as for the whole Christian tradition, it is clear that the voluntary self-sacrifice of Jesus is not an allegorical abolition of the concept of worship. According to Ratzinger, not those who kill Christ are the ones who are offering a sacrifice, but rather Christ himself gives glory to God by sacrificing himself and bringing human existence within God's own being. To explain the meaning of Rom 3:25, Ratzinger refers to the interpretation of the text by Hartmut Gese (1929–). He says:

He who is crucified represents God on his throne and unites us with him through the sacrifice of the human blood that is his life. God becomes accessible to us and appears to us in him who is crucified. The reconciliation is effected, not from man's side in a rite of substitutionary shedding of blood or giving of life, but from God's. God sets up the link between us ... The curtain in front of the Holy of Holies is torn asunder; God is very close to us; he is present for us in death, in suffering, in dying.<sup>50</sup>

Thus, explains Ratzinger, the theme of atonement and of substitution, which belongs to the broad sphere of cultic thought, was already presented by Christ at the Last Supper. Christ interpreted his death in terms of prophetic categories, which were available to him above all in the Servant Songs of Deutero-Isaiah.<sup>51</sup> Ratzinger continues that at the Last Supper, Christ not only merged together Sinaitic covenant theology and prophetic theology, which shaped the sacrament in which he accepts and anticipates his death, but also made it capable of becoming present as the holy cult for all ages.<sup>52</sup> Thus, the Cross too becomes the synthesis of the Old Testament festivals, the Day of atonement and the Passover in one, the point of passage into a New covenant.

Referring to a book entitled *Le Sacerdoce du Christ et ses ministres* by André Feuillet (1909-1998), Ratzinger points out that Jn 17 is shown as rooted in the Jewish liturgy of the Day of Atonement.<sup>53</sup> Thus, on the one hand, the Cross of Christ is understood entirely on the basis of the liturgy of Yom Kippur. On the other hand, John, like the Synoptic gospels, links the Cross with the Jewish liturgy and theology

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50 Hartmut Gese, *Zur biblischen Theologie*, 105, as quoted in Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 96.

51 See Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 97.

52 See Joseph Ratzinger, *Many Religions – One Covenant: Israel, the Church, and the World* (Ignatius: San Francisco, 1999), 57-60.

53 See André Feuillet, *Le Sacerdoce du Christ et ses ministres* (Paris: Editions de Paris, 1972), 39-63, as quoted in Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 97.

of the Passover.<sup>54</sup> This leads Ratzinger to state that the theology of the Cross is a eucharistic theology, and vice-versa.<sup>55</sup> Without the Cross, the Eucharist would remain mere ritual. On the other hand, without the Eucharist, the Cross would be merely a horrible profane event. Clearly, there is a close connection between life as it is lived and experienced, and sacral actions in worship. This now leads us to speak of the relation between the Eucharist and the Church in sacramental terms and in the light of the central motifs present in the ecclesiological writings of the Apostle Paul.

### 3. Eucharistic Theology in the First Letter to the Corinthians

Having presenting the Cross of Christ as surpassing all that is merely ritual and symbolic, providing the Eucharist liturgy with its reality and content, Ratzinger goes on to present the Eucharist as the real worship for all the world. Ratzinger leads us to a next step, that of understanding the Church through a sacramental dimension. Here, he presents eucharistic theology in the narrow sense by focusing his attention to Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. Thus, the Eucharist is presented as pressing out beyond the sphere of mere cult in order that it may wholly become what it is and remain what it is.<sup>56</sup> Ratzinger presents the sacrament of the Body and Blood of Jesus by referring to four selected passages. I shall be here referring to them in brief.

#### 3.1 The Christian Passover

In 1 Cor 5:6-8, Ratzinger notes that two essential elements of the Old Testament Passover are apparent.<sup>57</sup> These are the lamb that is sacrificed and the unleavened bread. On the one hand, the lamb represents Christ in anticipation, and on the other hand, the bread becomes the symbol of the Christian life. Criticizing

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54 Ratzinger indicates that, according to Thierry Maertens, elements from the theology and the liturgy of the feast of booths have also found their way into the Christian theology of Easter. See Thierry Maertens, *Heidnisch-jüdische Wurzeln der christlichen Feste* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag, 1965), 59-72.

55 See Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 98.

56 See *ibid.*; Hector Scerri, "The Inextricable Relationship binding together Participation in the Sacrament of Christ's Love and Eucharistic Orthopraxis", in Hector Scerri and Joe Zammit Ciantar, *The Holy Eucharist and the Hymn 'T'Adoriam, Ostia Divina'* (Malta: Foundation for Theological Studies, 2014), 11-31.

57 "Do you know that a little leaven leavens all the dough? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be new dough, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Paschal Lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

the German ecumenical translation for providing the version “get rid of the old leaven,” whereas the Greek has “purify the old leaven away,” Ratzinger comments that the absence of leaven becomes a sign of the new start. He clarifies that the old cultic concept of purity is now becoming a category of everyday life: “this does not refer to ritual purifications, but to the breakthrough to a new way of life.”<sup>58</sup>

Being a Christian, therefore, argues Ratzinger, is portrayed as a continuing celebration on the basis of the new life. In this vein, the sacrifice of Christ becomes a breakthrough, a setting out into a new life, a life whose simplicity and sincerity are represented in the symbol of the unleavened bread. The Eucharist, therefore, is the constant basis of life for Christians, as the motive force that shapes their existence. Furthermore, Christian life, contrary to being just a moral striving, draws life from him who, for the sake of humanity, became a lamb and sacrificed himself.<sup>59</sup>

### 3.2 Uniting Oneself to the Lord

The second text which is of some importance for our question is 1 Cor 6:12-19.<sup>60</sup> Ratzinger describes this pericope as the most profound content of Christian eucharistic piety formulated as a standard of conduct, as well as a presentation of the heart of Christian mysticism. It is based on the *mysterion*,<sup>61</sup> that is, on the descent and self-giving of God, received by Christians in the sacrament. He argues that although the dream of blending divinity with humanity persists through all the history of humankind, such a union has become possible only through God coming down in Christ. In this way, therefore, God took upon himself the limitations of human existence, suffering them to the end, and in the infinite love of the Crucified One opened up the door to infinity.<sup>62</sup>

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58 Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 98.

59 See *ibid.*, 100.

60 “For me there are no forbidden things; maybe, but not everything does good. I agree there are no forbidden things for me. Food is only meant for the stomach, and the stomach for food; yes, and God is going to do away with both of them. But the body – this is not meant for fornication; it is for the Lord for the body. God, who raised the Lord from the dead, will by his power raise us up too. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, ‘The two shall become one.’ But he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Keep away from fornication. All the other sins are committed outside the body; but to fornicate is to sin against your own body. Your body, you know, is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you since you received him from God. You are not your own property; you have been bought and paid for. That is why you should use your body for the glory of God.”

61 Ratzinger notes that “sacrament” is the translation of *mysterion* and that the word “mysticism” is linguistically connected to this.

62 See Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 102.

According to this text, therefore, receiving the Eucharist means blending one's existence in a way which is analogous to what happens when man and wife become one on the physical-mental-spiritual plane. "The eros-love of the created being is taken up into the agape-love of the Creator and, thus, into that fulfilling and holy embrace of which Augustine speaks."<sup>63</sup> Ratzinger continues that the real end of creation, its underlying purpose – and conversely that of human existence as willed by the Creator – is this very union, "that God may be all in all."<sup>64</sup>

Another point which Ratzinger highlights in this passage is Paul's reference to the Church as the Body of Christ. Thus, the inner interlacing of the Eucharist and ecclesiology becomes evident. Ratzinger claims that this way of talking of the Church as the Body of Christ is more than just some term that might be taken from the social pattern of the ancient world to compare a concrete body with a body consisting of many people. This expression, he insists, takes as its starting point the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ and is therefore more than just an image. He says that since in the Eucharist, Christians receive the body of the Lord and, thus, become one body with him, this becomes the expression of the true nature of the Church.<sup>65</sup> This is expressed beautifully by Paul when he writes: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."<sup>66</sup> Similarly, Ratzinger states that "I, yet no longer I, a new and greater self is growing, which is called the one body of the Lord, the Church."<sup>67</sup>

### 3.3 One Body with Christ, Salvation No Magical Guarantee

The same ideas recur in the third eucharistic text in 1 Cor 10:1-22. Whereas the first part of the passage develops further the union of humanity with God through Christ, the second part concerns the Eucharist contrasted to sacrificing to idols. Ratzinger argues that anyone who makes sacrifices to idols makes common cause with them, gives himself up to them, and ultimately belongs in their sphere and is under their power. He clarifies however, that while there are no gods as such, there are forces that people make into gods this way and to which, in doing so, they give power over themselves, allowing themselves to be guided and shaped by these forces.

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63 Ibid. Commenting on the theme of the difference and unity of "eros" and "agape" in his Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*, Benedict XVI, says that God, as the absolute and ultimate source of all being, is at the same time a lover with all the passion of a true love. He asserts that while *eros* is thus supremely ennobled, at the same time it is so purified as to become one with *agape*. "The union, which man can indeed enter with God, is a union which creates love, a unity in which both God and man remain themselves and yet become fully one." See Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (25 December 2005), n.27.

64 1 Cor 15:28.

65 See Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 102.

66 Gal 2:20.

67 Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 103.

Ratzinger continues that something analogous to this – and yet quite different – happens in connection with the sacrifice of Christ: “The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the Body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.”<sup>68</sup> Here, once more, the religious attitude toward communion and that toward the Church blend into one another: “the one bread makes us into one body; the Church is simply that unity created by eucharistic communion, the unity of the many in and through the one Christ.”<sup>69</sup>

For Ratzinger, three things are important here. First, Paul talks about the universal presence of Christ. Ratzinger explains that while wandering in the wilderness, along with Israel, Christ gave himself to them sacramentally. Thus, in a mysterious fashion he was feeding them and giving them to drink with the Holy Spirit. The second important point is that the life of the Christian, and that of the Church, is interpreted as a wandering. Christ is not only the spiritual rock, but is also the one who is wandering along with his disciples. He is the Eucharist, the nourishment for pilgrims. The last point which Ratzinger points out is that since the Eucharist always demands and involves humans’ freedom, it does not grant them any “quasi-magical assurance of salvation.”<sup>70</sup> It stands to reason, therefore, that the risk of losing his salvation always remains. On the contrary, becoming one with Christ guarantees one’s salvation.

### 3.4 Institution of the Eucharist and its Proper Celebration

The final and most important passage about the Eucharist is Paul’s version of the institution narrative in 1 Cor 11:17-33. First of all, the connection between the Eucharist and the congregation is important here. The Eucharist is presented as the renewal of the assembly at Sinai. The Eucharist represents the new covenant. Ratzinger comments that in this letter, Paul is encouraging people to come together in response to the Lord’s call. In this manner, the local congregation of Corinth could be turned by God into a “new” assembly.<sup>71</sup>

In this light, the Eucharist must be celebrated in such a way that all people come together, on the basis of Christ and through him. Ratzinger explains that all eucharistic assemblies taken together are still just *one* assembly, because the Body of Christ is just *one*, and hence the People of God can only be *one*. Thus, Paul is exhorting the Christian community at Corinth to foster a true sense of coming together. Ratzinger maintains that this exhortation, directed to one local

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68 1 Cor 10:16-17. See Scerri, *Koinonia, Diakonia and Martyria*, 151-159.

69 Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 104.

70 Ibid.

71 See *ibid.*, 105.



congregation, is relevant to all congregations in the Church as a whole. He argues that on the other hand, anyone who does not celebrate the Eucharist with everyone is merely creating a caricature of it. He writes: "The Eucharist is celebrated with the one Christ, and thus with the whole Church, or it is not being celebrated at all."<sup>72</sup> He says:

If the eucharistic assembly first brings us out of the world and into the "upper room", into the inner chamber of faith, this very upper room is yet the place of meeting, a universal meeting of everyone who believes in Christ, beyond all boundaries and divisions; and it thus becomes the point from which a universal love is bound to shine forth, overcoming all boundaries and divisions: if others are going hungry, we cannot live in opulence. On the one hand, the Eucharist is a turning inward and upward; yet only from the depths within, and from the heights of what is truly above, can come the power that overcomes boundaries and divisions and changes the world.<sup>73</sup>

A distinction between the Eucharist and a profane meal is then noted by Ratzinger. He explains that, in Paul's writings, the coming together in the fellowship of Christian worship does not yet presume the existence of any sacred place in an external sense. Clearly, however, in the Eucharist, God's holiness enters the human sphere. The holiness creates a sacred space for itself and demands of human reverence before the Lord's mystery. Coming together for worship means being reconciled with humanity and with God.<sup>74</sup> On these lines, Ratzinger insists that awe is a fundamental condition for celebrating the Eucharist correctly. He writes:

The very fact that God becomes so small, so humble, puts himself at our mercy, and puts himself into our hands should magnify our awe and ought not to tempt us to thoughtlessness and vainglory.<sup>75</sup>

Besides, Ratzinger notes that the Incarnation is a historical event – not a philosophical idea – which in its very uniqueness and truth is the point at which God breaks into history and the place at which humans come into contact with

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72 Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 106.

73 Ibid., 106-7. See Hector Scerri, "Dall'*actuosa participatio* ad un'ortoprassi eucaristica autentica", in *Actuosa participatio: Conoscere, comprendere e vivere la Liturgia. Studi in onore del Prof. Domenico Sartore*, ed. Agostino Montan e Manlio Sodi (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2002) 507-520.

74 See *ibid.*, 108.

75 Ibid.

God. Only thus are humans freed from themselves. Ratzinger continues that the words of institution reach right down into the heart of the historical event. He writes: "In the inwardness of Jesus, that transcends time, they rise up so that this essential core of the event now reaches into every age. This inner core, therefore, now becomes the point at which time opens up to God's eternity."<sup>76</sup> This leads us now to examine the *existential* dimension of being Church and true Christians in the world.

#### 4. Ways of Living out the Eucharist

After having presented the broad outlines of Eucharistic theology in the New Testament at a genuinely sacramental level, as found in the First Letter to the Corinthians, Ratzinger passes on to the third level, what he refers to the existential dimension.<sup>77</sup> Here again, he considers a series of Pauline texts in which martyrdom, the Christian life, and finally the special apostolic service of preaching the faith are described in terms of strictly cultic concepts, so that they are thus brought into line with the Cross of Christ himself. In such manner, they appear as the continuing realization of what is portrayed in the Eucharist, and thus holds fast, throughout the epoch of the Church, that close connection between sacrament and life which stands at the origin of the Sacrament and is what alone constitutes the Sacrament as such.<sup>78</sup> The texts include Phil 2:17 (to which 2 Tim 4:6 again makes brief reference) and Rom 12:1.<sup>79</sup>

##### 4.1 Martyrdom

For Ratzinger, martyrdom nourishes faith. It is a way in which Christians become themselves a Eucharist. Martyrdom is a matter of Christians' life being spilled out as a sacrificial gift, of their letting themselves be spilled out for others.<sup>80</sup> Referring to Polycarp's *Letter to the Philippians*, Ratzinger starts by presenting the possibility

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76 Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 110.

77 As a supplementary reading concerning this existential dimension, see John Anthony Berry, "Communion and Co-responsibility in the Church," in *50th International Eucharistic Congress. Proceedings of the International Symposium of Theology. The Ecclesiology of Communion Fifty Years after the Opening of Vatican II* (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2013), 811-820; Hector Scerri, "The Eucharist and Freedom: Recalling the Impact of the Magisterium of Pope John Paul II at the International Eucharistic Congress at Wrocław (1997)", *The Person and the Challenges* 2/1 (2012): 193-206; Scerri, *Koinonia, Diakonia and Martyria*, 260-283.

78 See Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 99.

79 See *ibid.*, 112.

80 See Pierre Bannard, "Mourir et vivre avec Jesus-Christ selon Saint Paul", *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuse* 36 (1956): 101-112.

of Paul becoming a martyr expressed in liturgical terminology: “Even if I am to be poured as a libation upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad ...” Ratzinger comments that the witness of the Apostle’s death is liturgical in character. He explains that what happens in this offering is a becoming one with the self-giving of Jesus Christ, with his great act of love, which is as such the true worship of God. Thus, as Ratzinger explains it, the apostle’s martyrdom shares in the mystery of the Cross of Christ and in its theological status. In other words, it is worship being lived out in life, which is recognized as such by faith, and thus it is serving faith.

The idea of martyrdom depicted as liturgy is fully developed in the account of the martyrdom of Saint Polycarp. Ratzinger highlights the fact that Polycarp, with his hands tied behind his back, “as a noble *ram (lamb!)* out of a great flock, for an oblation, *a whole burnt offering made ready and acceptable to God.*”<sup>81</sup> The self-giving into the Body of Christ has overcome the power of death: the martyr lives, and gives life, above all through his death, and thus he has himself entered into the eucharistic mystery. He says:

The entire martyrdom is depicted as liturgy – indeed, as the process of the martyr’s becoming a Eucharist, as he enters into full fellowship with the Pascha of Jesus Christ and thus becomes a Eucharist with him.<sup>82</sup>

Ratzinger notes that meanwhile the martyr is being brought to the ready-laid fire and bound there, he utters a kind of a eucharistic prayer. Here, the martyr praises God that he has been found worthy to come to share in the cup of Jesus Christ in the prospect of Resurrection. The words from the Book of Daniel, which were probably included in the Christian liturgy at an early stage are also present. In his prayer, for instance, Polycarp asks God that “may I, today, be received ... before you as *a rich and acceptable sacrifice.*”<sup>83</sup> Ratzinger continues that just like eucharistic prayers in the liturgy, this passage ends with a great doxology.

Presenting martyrdom as that purifying fire which gradually remoulds the Christian whereby his life becomes a gift for God and for other people, Ratzinger comments on a triple miracle in which the liturgical character of the Polycarp’s martyrdom is manifested. He says:

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81 Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 113. See Scerri, *Koinonia, Diakonia and Martyria*, 271-279.

82 Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 112-3.

83 *Ibid.*

First, the fire swells out in the shape of a sail, which enfolds the saint all around. The blazing pile of wood appears like a ship with billowing sails, carrying the martyr beyond the bounds of earth and into the hands of God. But his burned-up body, so it is said, looked, not like burned flesh, but like baked bread. And then finally there is no smell of burned flesh arising, but those who were present became aware of a sweet odour “like that of incense or of costly spices.”<sup>84</sup>

Ratzinger explains that the “sweet smell,” referred to in the Old Testament just as in the New, is an expression for a life that has been made pure. Thus, there is no longer the stench of lies and corruption or death’s smell of decay, but the refreshing air of life and love, the atmosphere appropriate for God and one that heals people. Furthermore, the image of the sweet odour goes along with that of being changed into bread: “the martyr has become like Christ; his life has become a gift.”<sup>85</sup> Perhaps the most impressive demonstration of all this in our own time is the martyrdom of St Maximilian Kolbe (1894–1941). Ratzinger remarks that while Kolbe’s whole life is destroyed amid songs of praise, in that very way, the radical self-giving, the giving away of himself, is consummated: “whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life will save it.”<sup>86</sup>

#### 4.2 Christian Life

In contrast to the worship involving external sacrifices such as animals and things, the true sacrifice to God is that of human’s inmost being, which is itself transformed into worship. Ratzinger suggests that chapter 12 of Paul’s Letter to the Romans is the best description of Christian living as a Eucharist. In this passage, Paul exhorts the Romans to “present” their bodies – that is, themselves – “as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship [is for you the true and appropriate worship / the rational worship].”<sup>87</sup> The word “sacrifice” implies the whole of the human spirit which sums itself up and expresses itself.<sup>88</sup>

Ratzinger clarifies that it is the Logos, the Son, that makes the People of God sons and daughters in the sacramental fellowship in which they are living. This worship is characterized by the *logos*. In other words, therefore, the *logos* himself has become a body and gives himself to them in his Body. It is the divine *logos* itself who is praying within man and is thus drawing man into its own participation in

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84 Ibid., 113.

85 Andreas Lindemann and Henning Paulsen, *Die Apostolischen Väter* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1992), 258-85, as quoted in Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 114.

86 Matt 16:25.

87 Rom 12:1.

88 See Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 115.

the divine being.<sup>89</sup> Ratzinger explains that the mysticism of identity, in which the *logos* and the inner dimension of the human person blend together, is transcended by a Christological mysticism. He writes:

We ask that the Logos, Christ, who is the true sacrifice, may himself draw us into his act of sacrifice, may “logify” us, make us “more consistent with the word”, “more truly rational”, so that his sacrifice may become ours and may be accepted by God as ours, may be able to be accounted as ours. We pray that his presence might pick us up, so that we become “one body and one spirit” with him.<sup>90</sup> We ask that his sacrifice might become present not just in an exterior sense, standing over against us and appearing, so to speak, like a material sacrifice, that we might then gaze upon and regard as men once did the physical sacrifices of old. We would not in that case have entered into the New Covenant at all. We are asking rather that we ourselves might become a Eucharist with Christ and, thus, become acceptable and pleasing to God.<sup>91</sup>

Ratzinger continues that the application of liturgical language to Christian life rather than being a moralizing allegory or bypassing the Cross and the Eucharist, is correctly understood only when it is read in the context of the Eucharist and of the theology of the Cross. Ratzinger concludes that the bodies – that is, the bodily persons – that become a Eucharist no longer stand alongside each other, but become one with the other; that is one in the one Body and in the one living Christ.<sup>92</sup> Christian living can therefore be understood as being drawn into the fellowship of love with God in one’s entire bodily existence, in bodily fellowship with Christ.

### 4.3. Service

The text with which Ratzinger presents mission as service is the passage of Rom 15:16. Here, Ratzinger directs his attention on Paul’s understanding of the office of apostle with which he has been charged. He says that he has written the letter “to be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>93</sup> Ratzinger explains that in handing on the gospel, by means of this letter, Paul, as Heinrich Schlier (1900–1978) puts it, is “accomplishing the

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89 See the relevant passages and their interpretation in Schlier, *Der Römerbrief*, 356f.

90 See Joseph-André Jungmann, *Missarum Sollemnia*, II (Freiburg: Herder, 1952), 236f.

91 Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 116.

92 See Schlier, *Der Römerbrief*, 355f.

93 Rom 15:16.

mandate authorized by God, legitimized by him, and delegated by him to the Apostle."<sup>94</sup> Thus, explains Ratzinger, "this word that has been written, in order that it may then be proclaimed, is an apostolic action; more, it is a liturgical even a cultic-event."<sup>95</sup>

Ratzinger says that whereas in the Letter to the Philippians, martyrdom is presented as a liturgical event, associated with the theology of the Cross and with eucharistic theology, now, in Rom 12, the service of preaching the faith appears as a priestly activity. This priestly sacrificial action, affirms Ratzinger is an eschatological service of ministry. It is, in other words, the fulfilment and the perfecting of the Old Testament sacrificial services. Ratzinger refers to a presentation of Paul "as sacrificial priest of the eschatological cosmos."<sup>96</sup>

This new liturgy not only helps the world of the pagans to change so as to be a renewal of humankind, but also becomes, as such, a cosmic liturgy "in which humankind shall become adoration, become the radiance of the glory of God."<sup>97</sup> Ratzinger explains that mission and liturgy do not exist alongside each other, rather, both constitute a living whole with several dimensions. He says:

The true Christian plane of existence can be attained only when mission has a sacramental basis, that is being united in a concrete sense with the Body of Christ, which was sacrificed and is living eternally in the Resurrection. Only by becoming Eucharist, can a Christian life be drawn into the Passover of the Lord and live up to the new liturgy that has been founded by the Cross.<sup>98</sup>

The Eucharist is the source of mission, insofar as it is the mystical heart of Christianity, in which God mysteriously comes forth, from within himself and draws his people into his embrace. Ratzinger maintains that in order for mission to be more than propaganda for certain ideas or rather to come from God and lead to God, it must spring from a more profound source, a source both deeper and higher than advertising and persuasion. He writes: "Christianity is not the

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94 Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 119.

95 Ibid.

96 Schlier, *Der Römerbrief*, 430f. Erik Peterson points out the connection between this passage and Isa 66:20: "And they shall bring all your brethren from all the nations as an offering [*minchah*] to the Lord." He continues that "Paul feels himself to be the one who is carrying out this promise that had been envisaged as being part of the end." See Erik Peterson, *Brief an die Römer* (Würzburg: Echter, 1997), 367. This reference to Isa 66:20, is also noted by Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 712. Fitzmyer likewise emphasizes the connection with Phil 2:17 and Rom 12:1.

97 Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 119.

98 Ibid.

result of persuading people; rather, it is something truly great," as Ignatius of Antioch (c.35–c.98) so beautifully puts it his epistle to the Romans.<sup>99</sup>

Referring to the patroness of missions, Ratzinger explains that for St Thérèse of Lisieux (1873–1897), notwithstanding the fact that she never set foot in a missionary territory, the centre for all missionary activity and Christian living is what she calls simply "heart" and "love", that is the Eucharist. As Thérèse says, if this heart is not beating, then the apostles can no longer preach, the sisters can no longer console and heal, the laity no longer lead the world toward the Kingdom of God. The heart must remain the heart, that through the heart the other organs may serve aright. Love, then, is all. Love reaches beyond times and places.

## 5. Conclusion

The Church, then, in the thought of Joseph Ratzinger implies the enduring presence of the divine and human love of Jesus Christ, which is always the source and origin of the Church. She is the channel open from the open side of the Lord and from the man Jesus to the people who are his "members", themselves becoming a Eucharist and thereby themselves a "heart" and a "love" for the Church.<sup>100</sup> In this sense, the Eucharist or its celebration should not be seen as a purely cultic act as if divorced from actual Christian living. On the contrary, one's understanding of the Church is enhanced through a deeper appreciation of the meaning of the Eucharist.

To conclude, Ratzinger's eucharistic ecclesiology could be summarized in the following points. First, one can speak of the Church, insofar as one mentions Christ first. Ratzinger insists that Christ shapes the Church and not the other way round. Every discourse on the Church should always consider Christ as the foundation for every statement. Secondly, Christ is related to the Church "by being, himself, the grain of the wheat that dies ... in the Eucharist, he is the always present origin of the Church."<sup>101</sup> In this sense, Christ is continually founding the Church. Thirdly, the nature of the Church is best understood with the term "Eucharist." It is the *synaxis*, the "meeting together." The Eucharist, therefore, draws and binds humans together, unites them, builds up the community. Fourthly, the Church grows from the inside outwards, not the other way round. Ratzinger explains that becoming incorporated in the body Christ himself has built, all the members of the Church

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99 See Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Romans* 3,3 as quoted in Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 121; Scerri, *Koinonia, Diakonia and Martyria*, 269-271.

100 See Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 122.

101 Ratzinger, *Co-Workers of the Truth*, 193.

bear witness and proclaim the presence of Christ to the world. Lastly, Ratzinger's understanding of a eucharistic ecclesiology implies not only the breaking down of social and political barriers,<sup>102</sup> but also an increasing movement of a truly Christian community that commits itself to a Christian life marked by service and love. In this light, "wherever the Eucharist is celebrated, the whole mystery of the Church is present."<sup>103</sup> Similarly, what Professor Grima sought to live up to in his pastoral ministry and academic vocation is to lead his dialogue-partners in seeking meaning for their lives at the portal of God's mystery.

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102 See *ibid.*; Scerri, "The Eucharist and Freedom", 193-206.

103 Ratzinger, *Co-Workers of the Truth*, 210.