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Sacraments and Global Realities: A Dialogue
 Janet Walton and Cláudio Carvalhaes

Introduction

When I went to Union Theological Seminary to do my PhD, I didn't know what would happen to me. During my six years there, I had the guidance and wisdom of Professor Janet Walton, whose sacramental heart was always near the poor. So I felt at home. Her advisory presence and challenging thoughts made me understand the sacraments in new ways. My time there brought me back to my people, to the poor. Now, with a new light.

At commencement when Claudio received his PhD hood, immediately, he took it off, walked to the back of the room, and put his hood on his mother. It was a stunning moment. Not only was Claudio thanking his mother for all she had done but also he was enlarging the moment for everyone else. He was commissioning us to see all those who are invisible. Sacraments compel other actions.

Personal Story - Janet R. Walton

When I was born, I was baptized before I left the hospital. It was a common practice. The nurses did so out of fear that if I died before baptism I would go to limbo where my soul would linger forever. My parents did not have anything to do with what the nurses did. They were not asked.

Throughout my life at home, we went to Mass every Sunday without fail. Everything revolved around this tradition of ours. Why? We were taught that if we missed Mass we would commit a mortal sin and that if we died and had not been to confession we would go to hell.

In those years, the Baltimore Catechism, defined sacraments as outward signs instituted by Christ to give grace. Fear undergirded our experiences of them.

Any connection between sacraments and global realities was far from our consciousness. However, we did pray for the conversion of Russia at the end of every Mass. Then, I thought it was because the people of Russia did not believe in God. No one mentioned that Orthodox Christianity was introduced to Kievan Rus probably in the 9th century.

What were we taught about how the sacraments worked?

- we received grace from God administered by the clergy
- we were assured a place in heaven,
- we could claim identity as a catholic, a church that did not allow any objections or questions.

And, yet there is something more, when my father died at the young age of 49, leaving my mother and five children, the church brought together a vast diversity of people for a requiem mass. Latin words and Gregorian chant shaped a eucharist of sorrow and support.

Fast forward to 1963. The Vatican II Ecumenical Council added a pivotal lens. From the earliest days of the liturgical movement there were scholarly, pastoral, and papal indications that there should be fully conscious and active participation in our liturgies. This notion not only altered the definition of sacraments but also the way people would engage in them. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

“The seven sacraments touch all the stages and all the important moments of Christian life: they give birth and increase, healing and mission to the Christian’s life of faith. There is thus a certain resemblance between the stages of natural life and the stages of the spiritual life.”¹

In other words, a sacrament consisted of a series of actions that celebrated the work of God already going on in the life of a person and a community. It was no longer a quantifiable element delivered to the person. Rather, the sacrament (an affirmation of God's presence in someone's life) would strengthen a person to grow in that Spirit and contribute to the welfare of others.

It took years to absorb the change and still not everyone fully understands the profound impact the ritual performance of the sacraments has on people. A church where I worked in upstate New York was renovated twice between 1994 and 2014 in order to connect sacraments and the lives of the people.

As a lay person who taught music, art, and worship I had great expectations for our participation in the sacraments, immersion in water, bread that was real. With our bodies, hearts, and minds we constituted the body of Christ. Not only did we feel its possibilities but we were responsible for embodying them. It was a far cry from fear as the primary motivation for going to Mass. As a laywoman, I also imagined that women's leadership in the church would begin to change. It did, but always with constant scrutiny and limits. And so it continues. Still there is a clear perception that influential church leaders do not consider women to be full partners in the body of Christ.

Fast forward to 1980 when I was appointed as a faculty member of Union Theological Seminary, a liberal protestant seminary in New York City. Union was a place where the faculty was aware and conversant about the impact of the Council on the liturgical expressions of many churches and religions.

One of the ways in which enthusiasm for a fresh approach was expressed was a decision the seminary community made about its worship.

In the late 70s when the organ in the chapel needed large-scale repair, the community opened a wide discussion about worship. Fewer and fewer people were coming to chapel. There was too great a gap between what we were talking about in our classrooms and what was happening in our chapel. In our classes we were talking about war, poverty, racism, sexism and sexual orientation. While sermons were attentive to these issues, the rest of the worship did not resonate with these global issues.

¹ From the *Catechism of the Catholic Church. Section Two “The Seven Sacraments of the Church” #1113*

The administration and faculty took a big risk, one that many alums and some faculty and board members did not support. Architect Philip Ives was hired to create a plan for the renovation of the chapel. It was quite radical. The design called for complete flexibility -- to empty the space of anything fixed, pews, pulpit, and table. In President Shriver's words the objective was not to destroy something cherished but to open up new possibilities, to require the leaders to think very intentionally about every aspect of what we did together.

Across the thirty denominations represented in the seminary, there were radically different understandings of sacraments, even the use of the word at all. But one objective threaded our worship. We were learning together what to do in this reordered chapel space that connected to our day to day lives as citizens of a challenging world. It did not take us long to appreciate the well-known aphorism, "We shape our spaces and they shape us."² No one led chapel without thinking about what we might do inside and outside the space. Our planning meetings set in motion interpretations of biblical texts side by side with global realities. We learned to open ourselves to the magic of rituals and to notice that every ritual has consequences.

Personal Story – Cláudio Carvalhaes

I grew up in a small Presbyterian Church in Brazil in the 70's and 80's. From what I received from that little church I can say with Saint Augustine that the church was my mother! Most of what I am now I received from the church. My first toy came from the church, the food that fed me as a child came from the church, my education came from the people of that church, my theological studies came from the church, my PhD came from the church. Without the church, I would not be here.

After completing my theological studies, which were significantly influenced by liturgical theologian Jaci Maraschin, I became a pastor of two small churches: a very poor church in the outskirts of São Paulo and then a church with undocumented immigrants in the United States.

As a pastor of Santa Fe Church in Brazil I learned that what kept the people together in the midst of a very harsh life in a very poor area was the love of Jesus. Several times I asked myself should I leave this church due to a proper theological belief or should I stay, accept their theological thinking and become part of the community? I decided for the latter. It was the beginning of my understanding that the dogmas existed for the sake of people's lives and not people's lives for the sake of the church's doctrines.

What I learned was not to dismiss the doctrines of the church but rather to insist that life and its challenges came first. That perspective adjusted the interpretation of the doctrines. To use Leonardo Boff's sacramental expression, it is the mixing of the "life of the sacraments" with the "sacraments of life"³ that makes and sustains what is to be holy in life. The Eucharist for instance, was a borderless place that embraced everybody's needs, hopes, disasters, desires, confusions, life and deaths.

² Attributed to Winston Churchill.

³ Boff, Leonardo. *Sacraments of Life, Life of the Sacraments*. trans. John Drury. Portland: Pastoral Press, 1987.

After that unforgettable experience, I came to United States in 1997, when I became a pastor of a very diverse church made up primarily of undocumented people in Fall River. It was a religious zoo. I had Catholics, Lutherans, Episcopalians, Methodists, Presbyterians, Pentecostals, new Pentecostals, and even atheists as members of my parish. Every worship service was always a blessing to the people but also the site of a battle to be fought the following week.

Like in the Santa Fe church in Brazil what kept us together was not necessarily our common beliefs but our common needs. We were there because everybody needed a place of safety, trust and healing. The church was a network of protection, sanctuary, and a place of care. But much more strongly than in Santa Fe, the sacrament of the eucharist was *the* event that held people together. The Eucharist became the place for spiritual nourishment and connection with the larger world, the assurance of a safe place where people could arrive, rest and be accepted. At that altar/table, people were not asked for an ID, either religious or national ID. There was no accusation, no threatening of curse or fear to those who were not baptized. The altar/table was the only borderless place that would fence/border this people from the dangers of the world.

But in order to be a borderless border altar/table, the theologies and liturgical practices were somehow different. Different language, participation, actions, food. The vastness of that altar gave space for any people to bring their wounds and aspirations. The certificate of God's love was the real ID for the undocumented. The transubstantiated body of Christ was the transfiguration of people's values and honor. The consubstantiated body of Christ was the assurance that the love of God was under, around, and within their lives. The real presence of Jesus Christ was a certificate to authenticate a people whose absence and denial was their daily bread. The memorial of Jesus Christ was the confirmation that they existed and that the memory of Jesus was the subversion of the whole system of exclusion and exploitation. We lived out these different understandings of the Eucharist together. Surely it was a radical ecumenical theological borderless place in a bordered sanctuary/oikos, in a world ready to devour them.

Looking back, the idea of the sacraments in my ministry as a pastor and now in my work as a teacher is nothing more than a reflected continuation of what I received from that little Presbyterian church where I grew up. It was that small church that taught me the two ends of liturgy, that is, the sanctification of people and the glorification of God, or the glory of God in the sanctification of humanity. By taking care of my life, they were living out the glory of God in the humanization of my own being. That church was not only deeply involved in my whole life but also changed the social landscape of my family. Without knowing it, this conservative Protestant church was teaching me what Karl Rahner once called the "liturgy of the world," where life and death happens everywhere and everytime.

Sacraments of Life and the Life of the Sacraments

How then are we to think, organize and negotiate the liturgy of the world, the liturgy of the church and the liturgy of the neighbor?

The sacraments are not "simply" a ritual event in the life of an individual or an institution but the sacraments are an enactment of God's gifts to us. Their divine potency, their political breath creates an expansive grasp on what it means to be human. The sacraments call us both to repent

from the colonial projects of death in the name of our God and to embrace those differences that lean towards those who are marginalized, the wretched of the earth. The sacraments of the Christian faith embody the liberating actions of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; they can shift, transform and change the ways of the world.

From the creation to the exodus, from the prophets to the women in the Old Testament, from Jesus being born as a refugee and living as a poor Palestinian, killed by the Empire and resurrected on the third day, the history of God is one of liberation. Jesus' life is the story of the ubuntu, "I am because we are and we are because I am."

But "Who is Jesus Christ, for us, today?" asks ethicist Larry Rasmussen. His answer touches every aspect of our traditions and practices. Rasmussen wants more from the essence and heart of the Christian faith. It is a long list. It includes a rereading of canonical biblical texts, a critique of the environmental impact of specific Christian traditions and practices, a reinvestigation of the content and significance of the Christian faith, a reconsideration of influential symbols, a renewal of Christian communities and a transformation of the ministries and missions of the church. It means "confronting human power and knowledge so as to find God in what we do know, rather than in what we don't."⁴

Such a rereading and reorienting of the sacraments implies *"a reorganization of power and a sharing of authority. It requires breaking down barriers and crossing the boundaries of gender, class, race, age, physical abilities. Reconstructed celebrations will not only recall what has been missing in traditional retellings of the covenant story but also correct what has been oppressive. These eucharists will be both festive and mournful, so connected are they with what has been done and left undone in this world."*⁵

The sacraments are not about politics! We do not need to politicize the sacraments; they are already political. The sacraments live in the life of the cities, in the midst of people. By way of the sacraments we practice how to live, how to organize ourselves.

Sacraments are ritual actions that compel humanitarian actions. They demand freedom and justice. They create a communal sense of life given by God through an ethics of possibility, turning death into life, exclusion into inclusion, insuperable borders to a borderless borders community.

In the words of Tissa Balasuriya, *"The Eucharist cannot really coexist with vast gaps of wealth and misery. This would be a mockery of Jesus and his message... No one should be in need. All things should be for the needs of all."*⁶

Claudio and I have structured the next part of our dialogue around the relationship of the sacraments of baptism and eucharist to four global realities: war, migration and refugees,

⁴ Rasmussen, Larry L., "Veni, Creator Spiritus. An Ecological Reformation," 19th Annual Bonhoeffer Lecture in Public Ethics, Union Theological Seminary, April 8, 2017.

⁵ Walton, Janet R. "Eucharist" in eds. Russell and Clarkson, *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 92–93.

⁶ Balasuriya, Tissa, *The Eucharist and Human Liberation*, (OR: Wipft&Stock, 2004), 80.

poverty, and climate change. As we present these examples we keep in mind the words of Larry Rasmussen: "we honor the Great Commandment by learning to love ourselves so fiercely that we change".⁷

1. SACRAMENTS AND WAR

We are living in a time when war is taken for granted and woven into the fabric of the global economy. We are involved, near and far, in killing, bombing, genocide, starvation, devastation of cities and cultures, rubble, rape, trauma. War is not only a big business that profits private companies, it is also a means of asserting power over others.

Aware of the never-ending reality of war our sacramental experiences offer the possibilities of radical peace, reconciliation, equality, justice and connectivity. How can we think about war from a sacramental perspective?

We offer three examples:

Oscar Romero

From the pulpit and the altar Bishop Oscar Romero led his people to stop killing each other. Week after week he pleaded with the people of El Salvador and with those countries supporting the war, to cease in the name of God. As Christian people, he asked those on both sides of the killings to see that their faith required reconciliation. Passionately, he begged the reigning government, one supported by the Central Intelligence Agency of the United States and also the majority of the bishops of El Salvador.⁸

The sequence of events in the movie was different from what happened. Romero was not killed after this plea to the military but on the next night just before the liturgy of the Eucharist. His last words were uttered just before the eucharistic prayer "let us join together intimately in faith and hope at this moment of prayer..."

For Bishop Romero and his people, the celebrations of the sacraments were urgent. From the enactment of the sacraments the people affirmed confidence in a God with them. From the power of the sacraments they knew what do in the face of constant threats of death and genocide. We know this by way of many examples, but particularly after the murder of Romero's good friend, Father Rutilio Grande. Against the insistence of many of the bishops, Romero asked all the people to come together as one diocese for the funeral Mass. There would be no other Mass that Sunday in the whole archdiocese of San Salvador. 100,000 people came together. For Romero and his people, the Eucharist was not a rote series of words and actions. José Inocencio Alas described what happened. "

*Romero crossed a threshold. He went through a door.
There is baptism by water and there is baptism by blood.*

⁷ Rasmussen, Larry L., "Veni, Creator Spiritus. An Ecological Reformation." Op. Cit.

⁸ "Blessed Oscar Romero's last sermon," posted by "sanctadeipara," Excerpt. YouTube video, Jan 27, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=27&v=luZV6whwj1g

That day there was also baptism by the people.

They came together to find the courage to carry on, to change directions, to live in the face of blatant injustice. Every word mattered. Nathan Mitchell's Eucharistic Prayer A, prepared in 1984 as a part of year-long study and consultation about new texts for use among Roman Catholics expresses well the sacramental connections Romero insisted on.

Here is a brief excerpt

*Through countless generations your people hungered for the bread of freedom
From them you raised up Jesus, the living bread, in whom ancient hungers were
satisfied,
He healed the sick, though he himself would suffer; he offered life to sinners,
though death would hunt him down.
But with a love stronger than death, he opened wide his arms and surrendered his spirit.⁹*

To live from the spirit of the sacraments, to embody their power, has a cost. Speaking the words of life in a context of death defies the currency of our time. The borderlessness of the sacraments spills over into war zones not only from inside of our churches but also right in the midst of the conflicts! The ritual enactments of the eucharistic sacrament stands as a sign of resistance.

Sacramental Bodies One

In 2014 in Kiev, Ukraine, “Amidst burned buses, tear gas and barricades...: Orthodox priests turned out, not to protest, but rather to pray on the frontline.¹⁰ Orthodox priests called upon God as they stood between pro-European Union activists and police lines.

How else can the waters of our baptism move our bodies to invoke the peace of Christ and expand the possibilities of dialogue and a just life?

Indigenous people everywhere in the world are fighting to protect their lands. In Standing Rocks situations, in United States and everywhere in the world, indigenous people continually resist desecration, abuse, stolen property. Their dignity, their beliefs, their worldview, their very souls are being utterly destroyed. How can the oil of our anointing, the gifts of bread and wine be shared as a way to raise borders of protection to those who are more vulnerable! How can the altar of the Eucharistic sacrament offer a wall of protection for those who are being taken away?

In the words of Nathan Mitchell” “[S]acrament is **an act**,¹¹ not a thing; it is the placing of what we value most into the care of human practices.” So we place what we most value, the sacraments of our faith, in the hands of the poor in the places of disasters, wars, abandonment,

⁹ Mitchell, Nathan D., *Eucharistic Prayer A*, International Committee on English in the Liturgy, Inc., 1986.

¹⁰ Blumberg, Antonia, *In Kiev, Protests Bring Orthodox Priests To Pray On The Frontline Despite Government Warnings*, <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/01/24/kiev-protests-ests_n_4660431.html>

¹¹ Mitchell, Nathan D. *Meeting Mystery: Liturgy, Worship, Sacraments*. (New York: Maryknoll, Orbis 1984), 268.

destruction and death. Following Augustine, we receive who we are, then there, in the midst of the war we offer ourselves as a Eucharistic action, bringing about life in the midst of death.

Sacramental Bodies Two

Imagining that sacraments are rituals of radical commitment and actions in the face of war, what can we do here, among us? Here is one example offered by students from Union Seminary.

It was the fifth anniversary of the war in Iraq. Most members of our community have not lived in a war zone. Only one student was a veteran. Still, they did not want to observe this marking of the US presence in Iraq with words only.

At the door of the chapel, that day, there was an inert body of one of our students on the floor. Each person had to step over it in order to get inside. There were more inert bodies of our students in other places in the chapel. We had to step around or over them to find a chair and also when the time came to share communion.¹²

The decision of our students to lie on the floor of the chapel as if dead added a lens of interpretation to everything we sang, heard, said, and did. We felt uncomfortable. That led to openness. War is about real people, some far away, some who live out the trauma of it when they return, all of us who fund the wars. As the experience moved on with a liturgy of word and sacrament, some students went back to the narthex and dragged the bodies into the circle. Others knelt by them.

In the words of Louis-Marie Chauvet, "The most spiritual takes place in the most corporal, God in this mystery of self-communication, coming really at "the risk of the body in sacrament."¹³

Through the sharing of water, bread, wine and grapes, the sacraments tell us of God's option for peace and in opting for peace we are opting for the weakest link in the social chain: poor people.

2. SACRAMENTS AND IMMIGRATION

Several months ago there was an article in the New York Times entitled, *A Northbound Path, Marked by More and More Bodies*.¹⁴ It was an account of objects and body parts of undocumented immigrants who died in Texas and Arizona trying to evade Border Patrol checkpoints. Their bodies were strewn in ranches, found near lakes, some only skeletons left

¹² The excerpt cited here is part of a longer video, "James Chapel Worship-Practicing for Life" that illustrates the evolution of worship at Union Theological Seminary, New York from 1979 to 2014. The excerpt on war can be found at 19:29, "<https://utsnyc.edu/life/worship>"

¹³ Louis-Marie Chauvet in Clauteaux, Elbatrina, "When Anthropologist Encounters Theologian: The Eagle and the Tortoise" in *Sacraments: Revelation of the Humanity of God: Engaging the Fundamental Theology of Louis-Marie Chauvet*, Philippe Bordeyne and Bruce T. Morrill, editors, (Minnesota: Pueblo Books, 2008), 170.

¹⁴ Fernandez, Manny, *A Northbound Path, Marked by More and More Bodies*, New York Times, May 5, 2017, pp. 1,18, 19. https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/05/04/us/texas-border-migrants-dead-bodies.html?_r=0

clean by vultures. One medical doctor who regularly examines the remains of the immigrants keeps a sign in her office, *Mortui Vivis Praecipant*. Let the dead teach the living.¹⁵

The words of John Chrysostom, the fourth Century Priest from Antioch are appropriate here:

*Do you wish to honor the body of Christ? Do not ignore him when he is naked. Do not pay homage in the temple clad in silk – only then to neglect her outside where she suffers cold and nakedness.... What good is it if the Eucharistic Table is overloaded with golden chalices, when anyone is dying of hunger? Start by satisfying hunger, and then, with what is left, you may adorn the altar as well. The temple of our afflicted neighbor's body is more holy than the altar of stone in which you celebrate the holy sacrifice.*¹⁶

The dead from the borders ask for our attention. John Chrysostom reminds us that when we look beyond what is superficial we will see what holiness feels like. We will touch it and claim it.

In the words of Elbatrina Clauteaux, "For if the God of Jesus Christ is the Totally Other, this God is also the Totally Near, really in symbolic and sacramental relationship with us."¹⁷

To that end, to bring the sacrament into relationship with lived realities, for the season of Lent, 2017, Lutheran Pastor Heidi Neumark wrapped the font, lectern, pulpit and table with barbed wire. In Neumark's words, "in our societies, barbed wire is used to keep people in (prisons) and to keep people out (borders)."¹⁸

She continued, "our baptismal font, the lectern and pulpit, from which God's word is shared and the altar, where we eat together, are places of salvation, welcome, and grace. These sacred places are perverted whenever churches use them to exclude, reject, condemn and hate those we are called to love."¹⁹

The font was just inside the door of the church. To see it wrapped in barbed wire grabbed the attention of every person who came in. They were viscerally uncomfortable. The symbol itself intends to convey pain that leaves a mark on a person. Baptism is not a one-time event. It demands constant self-reflection. To be baptized is to take responsibility for others whenever they are denied their human rights, held behind a boundary over which one cannot cross. To eat and drink at the eucharistic table requires speaking and acting in the face of mockery and exclusion.

¹⁵ "One Border One Body," YouTube video, 1:4, posted by "jcfjcfjcfjcf," Published on Apr 7, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mFfaI-RtL6Q&t=2s>

¹⁶ Michael S. Driscoll, "Eucharist and Justice," in *Sacraments and Justice*, Doris K Donnelly, Editor, (Michael Glazier, 2014), 40.

¹⁷ Elbatrina Clauteaux, Op. Cit.

¹⁸ Written by Heidi Neumark on a sign near the baptismal font at Trinity Lutheran Church, New York City.

¹⁹ Ibid.

In Mexico, a small group of women called Las Patronas are bringing food, and with it, God and life to the perilous journeys of so many immigrants trying to go North riding the train of death. They are living the eucharistic call to its fullest!²⁰

How would we think of our sacraments if we were immigrants and refugees ourselves? The borderless-ness of the sacraments is lived in the midst of those camps and at the border entrances all across the globe.

Displacement involves violence, state bio-power, economic exclusion, stealing of lands, wars, greed, wanton killing. If the sacrament is the place of God's dwelling, what does it say to displacement situations? If the sacraments are the shalom of God, what does the sacrament of God's unbounded embrace say to refugees?

Through the sharing of water, bread and grapes, the sacraments tell us of God's option for the poor!

3. SACRAMENTS AND DISREGARD: POVERTY

The migrants who don't survive during border crossings are often buried without any identification about who they were. It is the ultimate expression of disregard. These deceased men and women gave all they had to secure what would be safer and healthier with more promise for their families. Their bodies, whatever was left of them, were wrapped in cloth and buried in a milk crate or in a mound of bodies, often with no names.

Something similar happens in New York City where Claudio and I live. To this day people who are poor are also buried in a mound of bodies, often, too, without names, in Potter's Field on City Island.

A few years ago a group of homeless people from an organization called, ""Picture the Homeless came to Union Seminary to lead a memorial service. Over several months they planned it and then led it. They created a temporary wall to remember their friends by name.

To be present for this experience was to remember people who are nameless in death as often in life, but there was more. We were side by side, people who are comfortably housed and people who would return to the streets. Together we were creating a sacramental space across well-defined social borders. Normal structural power was reversed, turned on its head. People who were regularly passed by and ignored led the liturgy from the authority of their human dignity. They spoke for themselves instead of others doing it for them. It was liminal space: uncomfortable, unpredictable and layered with holiness. Something very compelling and true happened for everyone. We felt the disregard that is writ large in homelessness. We caught the strength of anger in the face of penetrating injustice. And we knew what care, respect, courage and commitment felt like when it is informed by poverty.

²⁰ "Women of Las Patronas get fast food to migrants on Mexico's Beast train – video," YouTube video, 4:36, posted by "MSNBC," Jun 28, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YgTzjaAGDG0>

Theologian Michael Himes writes: *“In a world where the loving kindness of God is everywhere present but often overlooked, the church's sacraments break through the fog and call attention to this reality.”*²¹

To speak of poverty and sacraments through the lenses of what is essential to live at all, bread and water, is in Himes' words, “to celebrate grace for a moment, thereby allowing divine presence to gain a stronger foothold in our lives.”^[11]

The sacraments can undo our attitudes about poverty, both conceptually and practically. The sacraments can foster an economy that embraces all and gives dignity to all. Beyond platitudes, the sacraments proclaim every day: No one goes hungry! No one goes without home! No one goes without honor and God's glory!

In order to have that happen we need sacramental rituals that are marked and contextual, that can be broken apart to meet the needs of each community! We need a decolonized eucharist that will pay attention to the poor, that will work from the ground up, that will be guided by what the poor are doing in order to survive and keep living. The quest here is not to abandon our theoretical work with some sort of anti-intellectual movement that sees theory as a waste of time but rather to see how people are finding ways to survive and move our thinking and practices near them. We can have an exchange of ideas and care. But for that to happen, the church needs to be the church of and for poor people. Not the church of a small hierarchy, not a church of males only, not a church for heterosexuals only, not only a church for the rich classes.

There is the story of Pastor Violet Little.

Rev Little is the pastor of a homeless church in downtown Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in the United States. Every week they gather on Logan Square where many homeless people and housed people come to celebrate God and share the sacrament of the eucharist. This church does not require any form of ID: a religious ID, a moral ID, a citizenship ID. Everyone is welcomed there.

One day when Pastor Little said, I am sorry I didn't bring bread and wine, one of the people without a home said: “I've got bread.” And with that old, moldy piece of bread, the Eucharistic prayer was prayed and everybody was fed. While the logic and grammar of our society teaches us that we have to save ourselves, these people showed us that what we have we give. That is the logic of the eucharist! To give, to offer, to share, to feed each other's body, to heal each other's wounds. No matter what we can always start over. Sacraments are places of new beginnings where we all gain dignity, and where recognition is extended to every aspect of our lives.

"Like slavery and apartheid"²² said Nelson Mandela, poverty is not natural. It is human-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings. The sacraments are potent actions with enough reverberations that it can urge our thinking and acting towards the eradication of poverty.

²¹ Michael Himes in Johnson, Elizabeth A., *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love*, (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2015), 41.

²² Mandela, Nelson, “In full: Mandela's poverty speech,” http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/4232603.stm

Through the sharing of water, bread and grapes, the sacraments tell us of God's option for the poor!

4. SACRAMENTS AND CLIMATE ²³

"The planet does not have time for this,"²⁴ the title of an article by Bill McKibben, is a call to every human being to take notice of what the world could lose if we don't act on behalf of our planet. Al Gore echoes this same urgency.

Ethicist Larry Rasmussen, argues for nothing less than a reformation to address the ecological crises among us. The eco-Reformation task, he writes, is to connect "*multiple* social worlds to a shared view of human and Earth histories"²⁵ and to find alliances for the long haul good of both people and the planet.

Christ Lutheran Church, San Diego, offers an example.²⁶ The floor of the church is created to express a stream of water that connects to the baptismal font and the altar. The water flows through the sanctuary doors, spreads on the step and goes into the community. The idea, developed after the architect, artist and pastor studied Ezekiel 47, the face of the earth will be drawn to the water and Rev. 22, the river of life-giving water which issued from the throne of God and the Lamb and flowed down the middle of the streets. To see baptism so visibly connected to the streets is part of their mission to act against the acceptance of poverty, the prevalence of violence, and discrimination.

In the desert of Sonora, Mexico, there is a little Baptist community that also has a natural connection to the environment. As water is not common in the desert, they have created reservoirs for the rain water so they can feed their plants and take a bath and drink. On Baptismal Sunday, the reservoir of water served as the baptismal font for the sacrament. After the celebration of the sacrament, the kids were invited to play in the water.²⁷

The sacraments teach us to enjoy and to respect the resources of the earth while also providing limits for our desires. The United States alone, comprising 6% of the global population, uses 30-40% of the resources of the earth.²⁸ Unless the sacraments invoke, evoke and demand of us a new way of living, thousands of poor people will continue to die every day and we will put in danger the very future of our children.

Through the sharing of water, wine, bread and grapes, the sacraments tell us of God's option for the poor!

²³ "This Changes Everything Trailer | Festival," YouTube video, 2:47, posted by "TIFF Trailers" Sep 9, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YQhflH4alO0&t=27s>

²⁴ McKibben, Bill, *The planet does not have time for this*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/21/opinion/the-planet-cant-stand-this-presidency.html>

²⁵ Rasmussen, Larry L., "Veni, Creator Spiritus. An Ecological Reformation." Op. Cit.

²⁶ Larry L. Rasmussen provided the story of this window.

²⁷ "Baptism Baptist Church Sonora - Compacted version," YouTube video, 1:04, posted by "Claudio Carvalhaes" Jul 17, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tQrL9l8s6uQ>

²⁸ Steger, Manfred B., *Globalization, A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford university Press, 2003),87.

Concluding

Through God's love, sacraments compel actions, convey connections, relationships and solidarity. They defy, debunk and destroy the sense of private property, walls and fences. They challenge the logic of war and ecological destruction. They break with the commodification of our desires, and the inequality of the neoliberal market.

We have a prophetic gift of immense proportions in our hands. Sacraments are ritual expressions of God's presence that, in and through us, mend our gaps, remake our ways, and can turn around a world of evil into a place of equality, justice and love. However, there is an "epistemological disobedience"²⁹ at the heart of the celebration of the sacraments. The epistemological axis of God's presence is in the presence of the marginalized people, poor, naked, imprisoned, excluded. Through the sacraments communities live into reversals of power.

Where there are borders that impede life, the sacraments break them down! Where there are no borders and protection for the most vulnerable, the sacraments build protections, honor and care!

For the sacraments are God's incarnation in our midst, the very materiality of God in all the corners of the earth. In the sacraments, we can engage, expand, connect and become the "symbols that we are." In the sacraments, we bring life to the world and the world brings life to the sacraments.

²⁹ Mignolo, Walter, "Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and De-Colonial Freedom," in *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 26(7–8), 4.