



Eucharistic Theology as a Condition of Eucharistic Revival According to John Paul II and Benedict XVI

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Abstract: The answer to the question of whether the Eucharistic theology of John Paul II and Benedict XVI in its selected aspects can constitute the foundation for the Eucharistic renewal of the Church is absolutely affirmative. This is proven by the depth of their theology, which consists in linking the Eucharist to the most important theological issues. An analysis of the teachings of John Paul II and Benedict XVI confirms the thesis put forward in the introduction to this paper that the Eucharist is one of the most important theological topics. The renewal and revival of Eucharistic life cannot consist only of pastoral activity, but in the constant discovery of the theological depth of this sacrament and the delight of its richness. Only such a deeply theological vision of the Eucharist can protect it from being made shallow and marginalized. John Paul II presents the Eucharist as: (1) the place where God humbles Himself to such an extent that His Majesty is hidden, and the reason for this is love; (2) the place of Christ's loving us "to the end," where He unites Himself to us, where the spousal nature of Christ's body transforms our bodies into His image; and (3) the place of revelation of God to man and of man to man. Benedict XVI presents the Eucharist as: (1) the principle and place of action of the Divine Logos, who was the principle and model of the creation of the world and of man, who took on flesh and became man and began anew the original relationship of creation with its Creator through obedience, and who now continues to transform the world through the Eucharist, transforming the human heart into His own image; (2) the place of action of the Logos and the worship of God by us joined to the Logos and in the image of the Logos; (3) the place of transforming our *eros* love (love of desire, passion, a climbing) for God and neighbor into *agape* love, that is, making the gift of self.

Keywords: John Paul II, Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, Pope Francis, Eucharist, Eros, Agape, Theology of the Body, *Participatio Actuosa*

The Church's Response to secularization in the United States is a pastoral program called Eucharistic revival, which is scheduled to conclude with the 10th National Eucharistic Congress on 17–21 July, 2024. The official website of the International Society of the Eucharist, referring to the need for revitalizing and renewing Eucharistic life, states:

Our world is hurting. We all need healing, yet many of us are separated from the very source of our strength. Jesus Christ invites us to return to the source and summit of our faith in the celebration of the Eucharist. The National Eucharistic Revival is a movement to restore understanding and devotion to this great mystery here in the United States by helping us renew our worship of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. (ISE 2024)

An obvious cause for the crisis in participating in the Eucharist is a weak faith, or even absence of faith, in the presence and activity of Jesus Christ within the Church. And there is no sense in discussing this issue, since it is obvious. What is less obvious, however, is why people who profess their Christian faith reject or disregard the Eucharist in their lives. The first reason for this is treating the Eucharist as one of many pious practices, alongside the Bible, personal prayer, or the various forms of popular devotions (rosary, way of the cross, etc.). A second reason is a certain set of attitudes, mainly individualism, subjectivism, and abstract spiritualism, which denies the very nature of man, union of soul and body and therefore capable of action and of understanding symbols (cf. *DD* 20). The abstract spiritualism mentioned here may result from the lack of a living and concrete faith, taking the form of the delusion that one has deep faith. It can also arise from a sense of superiority over most other believers and their forms of expressing their faith, or from the conviction of the richness of one's own interior life, which is identified with the richness of one's spiritual life. These two tiers within man are not however one and the same.

Pope Francis connects the attitudes mentioned in this second point with two theological errors of the past, namely with the errors of Gnosticism and Pelagianism, which have come back to life in the post-Modern era. Fascination with Gnosticism, most often unconscious, consists in understanding faith as enclosed in subjectivism, where only a specific experience or range of reasoning and knowledge is important, seen as bringing comfort and enlightenment, but where the subject is ultimately locked within the immanence of his own reason or his own feelings. The second error is the so-called "Promethean neo-Pelagianism" of those who ultimately rely only on their own strength and place themselves above others because they maintain certain standards. This is a fallacious counting upon one's own skills and abilities without the help of God's grace (cf. *EG* 94). This is almost identical to the way of life which John Paul II called, "living as if God didn't exist." (Król 2013, 233–34)

The main assumption of this article is that the Eucharistic revival should be grounded in an adequate theology of the Eucharist. The research problem is therefore to answer the question of whether the Eucharistic theology of John Paul II and Benedict XVI in some selected aspects can constitute the foundation of the Eucharistic renewal of the Church and what proves this.

The crucial assertions of this theological concept are to be found in the initial magisterial documents of John Paul II and Benedict XVI as well as in their other selected documents of prime importance. Hence, the research problem of this paper is to identify the key aspects of the Eucharistic theology of John Paul II and Benedict XVI which are indispensable for a fruitful Eucharistic revival in the Church.

This article will refer mainly to *Redemptor Hominis* [The Redeemer of Man], the first encyclical of John Paul II, written in 1979, and his "Theology of the Body," contained in his Wednesday Audiences (from September 1979 to November 1984), and also to his encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (April 17, 2003). From among

the numerous documents of Benedict XVI, this paper will refer to *Deus Caritas Est* [God is Love], his first encyclical, given at Christmas 2005, as well as his post-synodal exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* (2007). Due to the importance of Joseph Ratzinger's earlier writings and their influence on his teaching as pope, it will also refer to his publications from the time when he was not pope entitled *Eucharist and Mission* (Ratzinger 2000) and *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (Ratzinger 2014). The main idea behind the selection of sources is the first programmatic, keynote encyclical of each pope, their documents on the Eucharist, and the two main features of their theology: the theology of the body (John Paul II) and the theology of Logos—Logocentrism (Benedict XVI).

1. Eucharistic Theology of John Paul II

1.1. The Eucharist as God's Kenotic Love

It will be useful to begin with something that is not a papal document but an interview by the Italian journalist Vittori Messori with Pope John Paul II (John Paul II 2001). The journalist asked the Pope why God conceals Himself and here is his answer, which I want to apply to the Eucharist though it is not directly mentioned here. The Pope's response, which I extend to the Eucharist, could in my opinion serve as a sole, sufficient response. So here is the question:

God, then—the biblical God—exists. But isn't the objection of many people, yesterday as today, quite understandable? Why doesn't He reveal Himself more clearly? Why doesn't He give everyone more tangible and accessible proof of His existence? Why does His mysterious strategy seem to be that of playing hide-and-seek with His creatures? (John Paul II 2001, 37)

The Pope answers:

God's self-revelation comes about in a special way by His "becoming man." [...] the challenge comes from God Himself, since He really became man in His Son and was born of the Virgin. It is precisely in this birth, and then through the Passion, the Cross, and the Resurrection, that the self-revelation of God in the history of man reached its zenith—the revelation of the invisible God in the visible humanity of Christ. (John Paul II 2001, 39–40)

In the Old Testament, God revealed Himself in the spoken word, in the life and word of the patriarchs and prophets, but He revealed Himself most fully in Jesus Christ. This revelation is not a spoken word, nor a description, nor a lecture on philosophy or theology, but the Person of the God-Man.

Now the Pope asks:

Could God go further in His stooping down, in His drawing near to man, thereby expanding the possibilities of our knowing Him? In truth, it seems that He has gone as far as possible. He could not go further. In a certain sense God has gone too far! Didn't Christ perhaps become "a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles" (1 Cor 1:23)? Precisely because He called God His Father, because He revealed Him so openly in Himself, He could not but elicit the impression that it was too much [...]. Man was no longer able to tolerate such closeness, and thus the protests began. (John Paul II 2001, 40–41)

What is this protest, and did God not foresee it? This protest was caused by man being no longer able to tolerate such closeness. There is a certain contradiction in man's desires: on the one hand, man would like a God who protects him from illness and adversities, a God who is at man's disposal; but on the other hand, God should be absolute grandeur, requiring only external, ritual worship. The latter results from original sin and is linked to a false understanding of freedom as willfulness; that is to say, it consists in a lack of connection between freedom and truth, especially the truth of the human condition, that man is creature, not creator, and his vocation is to be a child of God and not God; a priest, and not lord of creation. God took care of this man in His Son, in His being humbled in the mystery of the Incarnation, cross, and resurrection and in the sacramental economy, that is, in His action through the sacraments of the Church.

Certainly God foresaw this protest of the synagogue and Islam. Why, then, did He go so far in humiliating Himself before man that He not only became one of us, not only died like a criminal, rejected by men, but also became bread in the Eucharist? I ask this last question as a follow-up to the previous questions posed by Messori and John Paul II. There is only one answer: God runs the risk of humiliation, and even disregard and scandal, purely and simply out of love. This love is not a lecture on how God loves, it is not a declaration of love; it is a personal love, the love of a Person for persons, such that a community is formed with Him—the Church as Christ in human persons (A Person in persons). In every mystery of the life of Jesus Christ there is a humbling (*kenosis*) of God, but this humiliation is complemented by the Eucharist, which, by His will, is love "to the end" and "without rest" ("The hour of our redemption" *EdE* 4) according to the words written by John on the Last Supper: "He loved His own in the world and He loved them to the end" (John 13:1b). The Eucharist is love unto the end, even to physical, bodily union. It is the fulfillment of the nuptial dimension of the human body (Dec 2004, 7–10).

1.2. Eucharist and Theology of the Body

Here we come to the link between the Eucharist and theology of the body in the thought of John Paul II. The Book of Genesis, showing the image of God and man, uses the hermeneutics of gift. The world is created as a gift from God, which is not “aloneness,” but the love of the Divine Persons. Every creature bears within itself the mark of this original, fundamental gift. There exists the Giver, the recipient of the gift, and a relationship between the two. Man is created in the image of this Giver. God created the world as a gift for man, but He created man in such a way that he finds fulfillment by himself giving gifts. Man, in the meaning of “male” (Adam) waits for a being for whom he himself will become a gift and with whom he will be able to maintain a relationship of mutual giving. Man fulfills his potential only through existing “with someone” and “for someone.” A communion of persons means existing in a mutual “for”; in a relationship of mutual gift. This is the fulfillment of the original solitude of man. This also explains the original happiness of man. This mutual gift is achieved through love. Thus there exists a deep connection between the mystery of creation, flowing from Love, and the enrapturing beginning of man as male and female. Adam, awaking from his sleep, cries with joy, “This one, at last, is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh” (Gen 2:23). Human joy is of an interpersonal nature, where “flesh” and “bone” express a person. The man wakes up from sleep into a dimension of mutual gift. The body is the original sign of creative gift and this is inscribed in the original consciousness of man and woman. The body of woman and of man is the witness, the sacrament of this gift. In this sense the body has a spousal dimension; it is a sign and a means of this personal gift. From the beginning, the human body, together with its gender, is not only a source of fertility, but also possesses a “nuptial attribute,” because it is able to express love by which a person becomes a gift, and actualizes the meaning of its existence. As Vatican II teaches, man is the only creature in the visible world which God willed “for its own sake” and which “can fully discover its true self only in sincere self-giving.” (GS 24) Man and woman, according to the law of creation, are given to each other and find each other only in making a mutual gift of themselves, one to the other. They bear within themselves the original, that is to say, the “nuptial,” understanding of the body, as they were created for each other in love. The human body is created to express love through the gift and affirmation (acceptance) of another by a lifelong giving of themselves to each other. This affirmation is an acceptance of a gift, but it also leads to further giving to the other person, leading to happiness for both (cf. Lubowicki 2022, 109–11). The spousal meaning of the body has not disappeared after original sin, but it needs the support of God and ultimately awaits the “redemption of the body.” The body has a spousal significance, since the human person has a spousal nature. The nuptial dimension of the body can be realized not only in marriage but also in the gift of oneself for sake of the kingdom of heaven. There exists in the human body

the freedom of gift, which points to the full sense of “nuptial”—“hermeneutic of the gift” (Franks 2020, 664–67). And that is our synthesis of the theology of the body of John Paul II (John Paul II 1997, 25–177).

If we take into consideration that Jesus Christ became man and took on a human body from the Virgin Mary, then His body has even more of a spousal aspect. He became man in order to become wedded to all of humanity, and to each one of us. Our new creation was brought about in this Body, our salvation and redemption. This Body, although glorified, is ever focused on a spousal love of the Lord of Glory. This Body is also the Body and Blood of the Eucharist, which not only reveals, but contains within itself the unbounded love of God for His Church and for each of His children. The truth about the Eucharistic Body in its supremely spousal character is not just an analogy, but the place of actual giving, which always begins a sequence of further gifts.

John Paul II puts what has just been stated as follows: “The Paschal Mystery completely reveals the spousal love of God. Christ is the Bridegroom because ‘He has given Himself’: His body has been ‘given,’ His blood has been ‘poured out’ (cf. Lk 22:19–20). In this way ‘He loved them to the end’ (Jn 13:1).” (John Paul II 1997, 481) The “sincere gift” contained in the sacrifice of the cross gives definitive prominence to the spousal meaning of God’s love. As the Redeemer of the world, Christ is the Bridegroom of the Church. The Eucharist is the Sacrament of our redemption. It is the Sacrament of the Bridegroom and of the Bride. “The Eucharist makes present and realizes anew in a sacramental manner the redemptive act of Christ, who ‘creates’ the Church, His body. Christ is united with this ‘body’ as the bridegroom with the bride.” (John Paul II 1997, 481; cf. *EdE* 15–16, 23) This bodily union of Christ in the Eucharist has the power to build the Church as the Body of Christ in her internal integrity, understood as a brotherly union, and in her sacramental dimension (*ad extra*), making of the Mystical Body of Christ the “sacrament of salvation” for the whole world (cf. *EdE* 24). Incidentally, John Paul II shows the meaning of the ministerial priesthood in this same key of the sacramental and spousal dimension of the body fulfilled by men (the priest as the presider of the Eucharist). “It is *the Eucharist* above all that expresses *the redemptive act of Christ the Bridegroom toward the Church the Bride*. This is clear and unambiguous when the sacramental ministry of the Eucharist, in which the priest *acts ‘in persona Christi,’* is performed by a man.” (John Paul II 1997, 481) This explanation confirms the teaching of the Declaration *Inter Insigniores*, published at the behest of Paul VI in response to the question concerning the admission of women to the ministerial priesthood.

1.3. Eucharist as *Participatio Actuosa* in the Life of God

Now it is time to move on to the first encyclical of John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*. Here in a valuable and most important section, entitled: “The Mystery of

the Redemption,” the Pope first describes the ways in which the Church continues the salvific mystery of Christ, which is the deepest principle of her life and her mission. These means are to confess and preach faith in Jesus Christ and in the redemption, accomplished on the cross. The Pope recognizes the Eucharist as a particularly active way to share in this Mystery when he states that:

The Church never ceases to relive His death on the Cross and His Resurrection, which constitute the content of the Church’s daily life. Indeed, it is by the command of Christ Himself, her Master, that the Church unceasingly celebrates the Eucharist, finding in it the “fountain of life and holiness,” the efficacious sign of grace and reconciliation with God, and the pledge of eternal life. (*RH* 7; cf. Lupu 2013, 17–18)

The Church lives the Mystery of Christ in the Eucharist, ceaselessly drawing forth her life from this Mystery, but also proclaiming this Mystery to the world. Since in the Incarnation Jesus Christ revealed God and His infinite love to man, and also revealed man to man, showing man his dignity and his vocation of becoming a child of God following the example of Christ, this truth applies especially to the Eucharist, which is a continual manifestation not only of the mystery of the Incarnation, but also of the mystery of the redemption, and what is more, the Eucharist is the application of this redemption to the lives of people of every time and place. For in it, Christ not only reveals God to man, but affords him an active participation in the life of God. Not only does it reveal the true face of man to man, but it is a place of constant transformation of man into the image of Christ until his final fulfillment at His second coming. Hence the sculpture in the cathedral of Chartres depicting the creation of Adam, where God is forming the figure of Adam and the face of God and man are identical, because they are both the face of Christ, is not only the best commentary on the words of the first encyclical of John Paul II, but also an image of what is happening in the Eucharist.

The Pope expresses this also, though in another aspect, referring to the words of St. Ireneus, that the glory of God is the living man: “Gloria enim Dei vivens homo, vita autem hominis visio Dei.” This does not refer to his physical life, but rather because “the life of man consists in the vision of God.” And to see God is to be transfigured in Him: “We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2). The Pope then speaks of Trinitarian love, which reveals itself in the Incarnation (cf. John Paul II 2000). But applying this to the Eucharist, we can say that this is the place of seeing God (*visio Dei*), especially in the sense of it being the place of the transformation of man, of becoming sons in the Son (children of God in the Son of God). Christ instituted the Eucharist to transform us into Himself. The transformative power of the Eucharist is shown in the lives of the saints, and this power is shown most of all in the Blessed Virgin Mary (cf. *EdE* 62).

This transformation also has the goal of renewing in man the original divine gift and calling, which is man's priestly dignity, which comes from the gift of being a child of God and having a particular distinction among creatures:

The "price" of our redemption is likewise a further proof of the value that God Himself sets on man and of our dignity in Christ. For by becoming "children of God," adopted sons, we also become in His likeness "a kingdom and priests" and obtain "a royal priesthood," that is to say we share in that unique and irreversible restoration of man and the world to the Father that was carried out once for all by Him, who is both the eternal Son and also true Man. (RH 20)

Becoming children in the Son presumes the building of a community of children in the Father, a people of God. And here then is another aspect of the Eucharist, to which the Pope dedicates much space in his teaching, particularly in the encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (2003). The overture of this teaching, as in most of our important themes, is the encyclical we have been discussing, *Redemptor Hominis*.

The Eucharist builds the Church, building it as the authentic community of the People of God, as the assembly of the faithful, bearing the same mark of unity that was shared by the Apostles and the first disciples of the Lord. [...] The Church lives by the Eucharist, by the fullness of this Sacrament, the stupendous content and meaning of which have often been expressed in the Church's Magisterium from the most distant times down to our own days. (RH 20)

2. Eucharistic Theology of Benedict XVI

2.1. The Logos Celebrating the Eucharist

The next most important elements of teaching about the Eucharist, pursuant to the topic of this lecture, are to be sought in the writings of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI. Due to time constraints, I would like to limit myself to only two, in my opinion the most original thoughts of this greatest theologian of the turn of the millennium. As previously stated, the first source will be his programmatic encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*. It is however worthwhile to note that already in the programmatic homily of his entire pontificate Benedict XVI points to the Eucharist as the gift of the Body and Blood of Christ, from which we draw our life and through which Christ desires us to change and become like Himself: "...we who draw life from the gift of Christ's Body and Blood, through which He transforms us and makes us like Himself." (Benedict XVI 2005b) The Eucharist, then, possesses a lifegiving aspect (it sustains our life) and transforms us into the image of Christ (Christoformation).

If we want to capture the essence of Benedict XVI's teaching on the liturgy, including the Eucharist, it is worthwhile to note two concepts, rich in content and terminology. The first of these is the idea of "Logos," and the second, the idea of "Love." Both of these concepts are hermeneutical keys not only to understanding the Eucharist, but are also the essence of Christianity. This is one more proof that the Eucharist is not merely an external, ritual manifestation of Christianity, but its essence.

The concept of "Logos" refers both to "meaning—template" and to "word." "Logos" is "the power bearing meaning." The words of John's prologue, "In the beginning was the Word," indicate that the creation of the world was preceded by a spiritual meaning, an idea of the world. The world is the materialization of this idea and "primordial thought" which God bore within Himself and which in the world became the sphere of history surrounding God and His creation. This thought of God is at the same time the Person of the Son of God (Ratzinger 2001, 104). After original sin this same Logos becomes the Incarnate Word, who accomplishes salvation and redemption, that is to say, the work of a new creation of man and of the world. United to a human nature, He brings humanity to God. And here we come to a great paradox: God is so mighty that He is able to become small; the Logos becomes so small that He reveals Himself as a human Person. In this way, God has inscribed Himself within a specific historical context, which is the path to Him. This makes it possible to encounter God and the worship of Him in every moment of history and in every place (Ratzinger 2001, 190).

This self-abasement of the Logos leads to a reversal of the direction of human history: instead of distancing ourselves from God through disobedience, the Logos introduces love and obedience. The mission of the Incarnate Logos consists in the perfect fulfillment of the will of the Father, in accepting it as His own, and thus in renewing worship as the proper relationship of man to God. The Incarnate Logos is first of all the Word of God's love for man, but thanks to His obedience He also has become the Word of the love of man/humanity for God. This fact restores the original relationship of creation to the Creator, and at the same time is a new form of worship, desired by God himself. It is worship "in Spirit and in truth" (John 4:23), and it does not consist in "something for life," "something outside a person's life," but in seeking and carrying out the will of the Father, which the Incarnate Logos expresses in the words: "My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to do His work" (John 4:34). The entire earthly life of the Incarnate Logos is the accomplishing of this new worship, and it reaches its anticipatory peak (1) at the Last Supper (His sacrifice expressed in ritual) and (2) in His prayer in the Garden, which is the fulfillment of the words of Jesus about His life, that "no one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own" (spiritual sacrifice) (John 10:18), and in the fullest, most visual sense, (3) in His death on the cross (blood sacrifice).

An expression of the initiation of this new worship is the cleansing of the Temple. The renewing of worship is in John's concept of the mission of the Incarnate

Logos: “Destroy this Temple and in three days I will build it up again” (John 2:19). This event after all is placed at the very beginning of the public ministry of Jesus, directly following the description of the wedding at Cana, which is a pictorial representation of the Messianic Banquet. Both of these events can and should be related to the Eucharist.

The Church is established by the Logos; it is the continuation of the presence of the Incarnate Logos after His death and glorification, and the space and time of His action through the word and the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. Consequently the Eucharist and the entire liturgy of the Church is the work of the Logos. The Eucharist contains within itself, and transports through time, two words that are the heart of the Church and the gift of the Logos for the life of the world. They also show the special presence of the Logos, Jesus Christ, among His people and as such are earth-shaking; they sound like this: “this is My Body, this is My Blood.” Ratzinger emphasizes the true meaning of these words, which express that the Incarnate Logos does not give “something” but His very self as the final, authentic sacrifice in which all the vicarious sacrifices of the Old Testament find fulfillment. This also means that God wants from man a love that transforms the person, and in which man is able to accept God and surrender himself to Him (Ratzinger 2013). No one is or has ever been able to glorify God like the Incarnate Logos, because none can love as He does.

Hence the essence of Christian worship of God must fulfill two essential conditions: first it must be offered through the Logos and united with Him; next, it must be in imitation of the Logos, consisting of obedience and the seeking and fulfilling of the Father’s will as the source of man’s happiness and blessing. In this glorifying of God, the Incarnate Logos joins the logos in man, and through this, all of creation, to Himself. The key here is the teaching of St. Paul, who asked the Christians of Rome for a life dedicated to God, using the following words: “I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship” (Rom 12:1). “Spiritual worship” in Greek is *logike latreia*. Accordingly, we must regard St. Paul’s concept of *logike latreia*, of divine worship in accordance with Logos, as the most appropriate way of expressing the essential form of Christian liturgy. This concept is the confluence of several different streams: the spiritual movement of the Old Testament, the process of inner purification within the history of religion, human quest, and divine response. The logos of creation, the logos in man, and the true and eternal Logos made flesh, the Son, come together (cf. Ratzinger 2014, 30; Ratzinger 2000, 259–61). “Eucharist” points to the universal form of worship that took place in the Incarnation of the Logos, in His Cross, and Resurrection, and so it can fully serve as a summary of the idea of *logike latreia* and may legitimately serve as an appropriate designation for Christian worship (cf. Ratzinger 2014, 30; Ratzinger 2000, 259–61). This means again that the Eucharist is not a rite in itself—although this aspect is also of great importance, because it recalls the development of the sacramental sign throughout salvation history and

corresponds to the corporeal nature of man—but is the essence of the Christian faith (*fides quae*—that which is believed; dogma), praise of God (*cult*), and Christian life (*fides qua*—an act of faith, trust, and devotion to God). All of this due to the Logos present in three dimensions: faith, celebration, and life.

2.2. *Participatio Actuosa* in the Eucharist Modelled on the Logos

The Logos celebrates the Eucharist. Participation in the Eucharist modelled on the example of the Logos is *actuosa participatio* (authentic participation). Imitating the Logos is (1) love as the dedicating of our life to God, the desire of fulfilling God's will and changing our life, but at the same time (2) acknowledging our human weakness to God, seeking God's help, and confessing that who we are and what we have has value only in God. These two elements make up the entire "spiritual sacrifice"; the desire to live with God and for God as the source of our happiness. (3) This is associated with an attitude of conversion, which consists of an integral view of oneself and the world in relation to God. In such a world, in which something is meant to be an end in itself, everything acquires intrinsic value, but at the same time loses it, because all things have their meaning and value only in God; the world is filled with meaning only when it becomes a "mystery" of the presence of God. Man and world, separated from the Source of life, are a dying man and world (Schmemmann 1998). The first part of the Eucharist is the Liturgy of the Word, the reading of the word of God, which is the source of life and thus the understanding of the will of God. The fact of understanding the will of God and making the decision to change one's life the most important act on the part of the participant. Without this act, participation in the Eucharist is reduced to the category of "external worship," to the category of "that which is sacred" in the sense of being separated from the life of the world or even standing in opposition to the life of the world. As indicating the newness of Christ, Christianity should be seen as the "the conclusion of religion" in the common understanding, and the Christian liturgy as the conclusion of "cult" in the sense of a sacred act isolated from life and opposing it (Schmemmann 1998, 18–20). I think that these words of Alexander Schmemmann are the best commentary for understanding *actuosa participatio* in Benedict XVI.

There are several conditions for a committed participation in the Eucharist, two of which Benedict emphasizes in a special way. These are personal conditions for such participation.

The first is an attitude of ongoing conversion, of turning oneself and one's life towards God, which is associated with the sacrament of penance and reconciliation. A good commentary on this can be the words of Aidan Kavanagh, who calls baptism and the Eucharist difficult sacraments that require human effort. In the case of baptism this effort is the catechumenate and the path of conversion associated with it. The catechumen must make a mature decision for God. Every Eucharist also

demands this same decision. In order to make a spiritual offering in the Eucharist and unite oneself to Christ, man must convert, or, rather, continually convert. Here we should insert the role of the sacrament of penance as a “baptism of tears” and the path to the Eucharist. Thus, the entire Eucharistic life of the Church appears as a certain framework for the process of human conversion. The Eucharist allows those who approach it by converting to God to live a mature Christian life. At the same time, the Eucharist itself constantly enables us to convert (cf. Migut 2023a, 86).

The second condition for committed participation in the Eucharist is an attitude of permanent involvement in the life of the Church and not just “going to Sunday Mass.” “The faithful need to be reminded that there can be no *actuosa participatio* in the sacred mysteries without an accompanying effort to participate actively in the life of the Church as a whole, including a missionary commitment to bring Christ’s love into the life of society.” (SC 55)

2.3. The Eucharist as a Continuation of the Divine *Eros* and *Agape*

The concept of “Love” is the foundation for understanding the nature of the Eucharist. The point of departure of the encyclical on God who is love is the distinction between three terms in classical Greek to describe the concept of “love.” The first is *eros*, love that is not born from man’s thoughts and will, but in some way imposes itself on him, and at the same time it is the love of desire, passion, and climbing. The Greek version of the Old Testament uses this term only twice to describe love, and nowhere in the New Testament. The second Greek term is *agape*, which is a giving, descending, self-offering love. The New Testament uses basically only this term, which was very rarely used in the Greek language. The third term, “*philia*,” is used in the Gospel of St. John to express the relationship between Jesus and His disciples. Jesus Christ and His teaching, omitting the word *eros* and introducing a new vision of love expressed by the word *agape*, show a very important feature, which was mentioned above when discussing the Logos, namely love as the gift of self. The source of this love is God, but man, created in the image and likeness of God, also bears within himself the ability to love this way, and only this kind of love is able to fill the “heart” of man (DCE 3).

Recalling Friedrich Nietzsche’s accusation that Christianity gave *eros* a poison to drink, Benedict XVI first refers to ancient Greek religion, which saw *eros* primarily as an intoxication, reason mastered by “divine madness,” which tears man away from the limitations of his existence and in this state of shock, by divine power allows him to experience the highest, which was expressed in the fertility cults, which included the “holy fornication” that flourished in numerous temples (DCE 4). This leads the Pope to say that there is indeed a relationship between love and the Divine: “love promises infinity, eternity—a reality that is higher and completely different from the everyday reality of our existence.” At the same time, the way to connect Divinity and love is not

simply to surrender to the control of instinct. He says: "Purification and maturation are necessary, which are also achieved through renunciation. This is not a rejection of *eros*, its 'poisoning,' but its healing, in view of its true greatness." (DCE 5)

Benedict XVI now perceives in the God of creation Himself (Old Testament) the yearning love of *eros*, that is, God's passionate love for His people, a love that forgives, which is so great that it turns God against Himself, His love against His justice. God loves man so much that, having become man, He even accepts His death and thus reconciles justice and love. In this way *eros* is ennobled to the highest degree, and at the same time it is purified to such an extent that it merges with *agape* (DCE 10). The image of the monotheistic God is one of monogamous marriage, based on exclusive and definitive love. It is an image of the relationship of God with His people and vice versa: God's manner of loving becomes the measure of human love. This close connection between *eros* and marriage in the Bible is hardly to be found in comparable non-biblical literature (DCE 11).

The uninterrupted continuation of God's desire for love (Divine *eros*), which becomes *agape*, is the New Testament, and in it its greatest novelty and originality, which is that it is not "something," but the Person of God and Man—Jesus Christ. "His death on the Cross is the culmination of that turning of God against Himself in which He gives Himself in order to raise man up and save him. This is love in its most radical form." (DCE 12) And here the Pope comes to the very significant statement that only looking at the pierced side of Christ (John 19:37) allows us to define what love is and to find the path of life and love. Conversion is the path of transformation of *eros* into *agape*, the process of maturing *eros*.

Only now, on such a solid philosophical and theological foundation, does Benedict XVI speak about the Eucharist. The love of yearning (*eros*), which becomes the love of humility and giving (*agape*), is perpetually maintained and continued in the Eucharist and through the Eucharist. This is expressed strongly in the words of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke: "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you" (Luke 22:15).

The first most important aspect of Benedict XVI's teaching on the Eucharist, expressed in points 13 and 14 of the encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, is that its establishment by Jesus comes from His desire to give the act of His sacrifice a dimension of lasting and salvific presence among His people. The ancient Greeks in the time of Jesus believed that in fact the true food of human life is the Logos, and the Jews believed that it is the Torah as eternal wisdom (cf. Migut 2023b, 235); now this Logos/Torah has truly become food as love.

The second aspect is that the Eucharist brings us into Jesus' sacrificial act, but not only in a static way, that is, in a way that we become one with the Logos (Love incarnate), but we are included "in the dynamics of His sacrifice," which should be understood as the Eucharist uniting us to His sacrifice and enabling us to live for God (cf. Góźdz 2022, 133–34).

The third aspect is the “mysticism of the Eucharist,” which is based on God’s humbling Himself towards us. The “mysticism of the Eucharist” has a completely different significance and leads much higher than any mystical rapture of man could achieve (*DCE* 13). Nothing compares to this personal, dynamic, and performative gift.

The fourth aspect is connected with the previous one, because, as Benedict stresses, the “mysticism of the Eucharist” is social in nature, because communion with Christ is at the same time communion with all to whom He gives Himself. “I cannot possess Christ just for myself; I can belong to him only in union with all those who have become, or who will become, His own. Communion draws me out of myself towards him, and thus also towards unity with all Christians.” (*DCE* 14)

The fifth aspect is the connection noted above in the proper understanding of the Eucharist with faith, worship, and ethos. Achille Maria Triacca will talk about mystery, celebration, and life, and Schmemmann will talk about theology, liturgy, and piety. The commandments of love of God and love of neighbor cannot be considered a morality that could exist autonomously next to faith in Christ and its every actualization in this sacrament: faith, cult, and ethos interpenetrate each other as one reality that takes shape in the encounter with the Divine *agape*. “Here the usual contraposition between worship and ethics simply falls apart. ‘Worship’ itself, Eucharistic Communion, includes the reality both of being loved and of loving others in turn. A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented.” (*DCE* 14) Similarly, John Paul II will say that we participate in the Eucharist so as to make our life Eucharistic (*EdE* 20).

Conclusion

The answer to the question of whether the Eucharistic theology of John Paul II and Benedict XVI in its selected aspects can constitute the foundation for the Eucharistic renewal of the Church is absolutely affirmative. This is proven by the depth of their theology, which consists in linking the Eucharist to the most important theological issues.

In the teaching of both popes the Eucharist is not found on the sidelines, nor only in pastoral practice, but at the center of the Magisterium. The teaching on the Eucharist is part of the teaching on the Holy Trinity (Trinitology), Christology, and Ecclesiology, as well as the teaching on Divine Grace. Neither is it on the periphery of Christian daily life but at its center, as it is the presence and activity of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit among us. There is no authentic Christian spirituality without the Eucharist. I say this to show that there is no full Christian life and no full Christian spirituality, without the Eucharist. The main principle of participation in

the Eucharist is to integrate our lives within it. As Kavanagh said, a cathedral into which no life is brought becomes a museum.

For both popes, John Paul II and Benedict XVI, the Eucharist, despite its simple form chosen in view of the intellectual capabilities of each person and the history of salvation that is completed in it, is the true mystery of faith. Not a secret but a mystery, that is, a wealth of content, of allusions, and, above all, the creative, salvific, and definitive power of God for the life of the world. The Eucharist grows first from the creative love of God, which is revealed anew in the saving love of the cross and the power of the resurrection, and leads those who draw from this source “in the time of the Church” (at this stage of the history of salvation, which is the time of the Church) to the final fulfillment of all desires in God.

Translated by Mary E. Van Scott

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