

Preamble

On May 9, 2008, Bishop Timothy W. Whitaker of the United Methodist Church and Bishop William S. Skylstad of the United States Conference of Bishops agreed on a mandate for the seventh round of the dialogue between their churches. They would assemble an equal number of scholars and theologians from both churches to discuss the precise topic, “The Eucharist and Stewardship of God’s Creation.” The stated goal was to produce a consensus document, the exact scope of which was left for the participants to determine. At subsequent meetings, the members decided to aim at a document that would raise up for our respective church memberships issues about the Eucharist and the environment for reflection, prayer and action. It also became clear in the course of the meetings that the sources of Catholic teaching about the Eucharist were not matched by similar sources for the United Methodist partners, and vice versa. For example, unlike Catholics, United Methodists give great theological weight to hymn texts sung at the Eucharist. All of our respective theological, magisterial and liturgical sources were mined and discussed in the course of the dialogue with great respect, profound learning and mutual enrichment on both sides.

As we present this agreed statement, we realize only too well its limitations. We aimed to frame the statement according to the historic liturgy of both churches. In doing so we respected the ancient axiom, *lex orandi, lex credendi* (“what the church prays is what the church believes”). At the same time we also fully realize that this statement does not reflect the breadth of what either church holds to be the total content of its Eucharistic belief or practice. Catholics and United Methodists will not find in this text all of their Churches’ pivotal theological understandings of what the Eucharist is and does. But in the end we judged that our mandate was more focused and precise. This agreed statement is modest, focused, grounded in what we can say together and what we could say to each other. Our task was to put these two rich traditions in dialogue and to discuss them in words and to pray about them together in the Liturgy of the Hours and the Eucharist (experiencing painfully the lack of full communion which prohibits intercommunion). No document can say everything, especially an ecumenical document of this sort. All such ecumenical documents are a work in progress about the topic(s) at hand and about the movement to grow together in faith and practice with the eventual goal that “all may be one.” We submit this text to the faithful of both our churches for their consideration in the hope that it will elicit prayerful and critical discussion not only about our differences but also about how much we share as Christians.

HEAVEN AND EARTH ARE FULL OF YOUR GLORY
*A UNITED METHODIST AND ROMAN CATHOLIC STATEMENT ON
THE EUCHARIST AND ECOLOGY*

Introduction

1. “Heaven and earth are full of your glory.” With this acclamation, Methodists and Catholics join the whole company of heaven in praising the God of all creation. When we celebrate the Eucharist, we offer thanks to the Father for the goodness of all the things that he has made, visible and invisible, we participate in the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (the Paschal Mystery), and we anticipate in the Holy Spirit the time when God renews heaven and earth (cf. Rev 21:1).

2. United Methodists and Roman Catholics in the United States have been engaged in formal ecumenical dialogue for almost forty years. Often these dialogues have focused on questions of dogmatic theology. The intra-ecclesial dialogue has been crucial in defining and extending the common ground between both communions. However, in this current round the topic is not a disputed doctrine as such but a common concern. “Our two communions are at an important crossroads. In the wake of the World Methodist Council’s adoption of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ),¹ we are being asked to consider how agreement on the doctrine of justification positions our dialogues to advance, with renewed vigor, along the path to full communion in the unity of Christ’s body, the Church. One way in which we can deepen our bonds of communion is to demonstrate how our churches can speak with a common voice about one of the great moral challenges of our age. The world is impatient with our disunity, and our remaining doctrinal divergences should not prevent us from speaking together and working together on behalf of God’s creation.”² In this way, “we seek to move from justification to justice, from the solid ground of our common baptismal faith to a prophetic witness that shows our obedience to the divine Creator and our gratitude for the divine handiwork that finds apt expression in the celebration of the Eucharist.”³

3. We believe that we can and should offer a joint prophetic witness on a significant challenge facing both our communions regarding the relation of humanity to the rest of the natural world. In Scripture, Jesus rejects the Pharisees’ appeal for signs from heaven. Jesus chastises the Pharisees for being able to interpret the appearance of the skies while being unable to interpret the signs of the times (cf. Mt 16:3). In our time, the appearance of the skies has become a sign of the times. The threat of climate destabilization, the destruction of the ozone layer, and the loss of bio-diversity point to a disordered relation between humankind, other living beings and the rest of earth. United Methodists and Roman Catholics have interpreted the signs of these times of

¹ The JDDJ was first adopted by the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation on October 31, 1999; http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_31101999_cath-luth-joint-declaration_en.html.

² “Mandate for United Methodist-Roman Catholic Dialogue: Round 8”.

³ “Mandate for United Methodist-Roman Catholic Dialogue: Round 8”.

ecological crisis as a summons to an ecumenical response.

Part I

The Eucharist as the Unity of Creation and Redemption

4. In the Eucharist we experience the unity of the mystery of divine salvation which encompasses creation, redemption, and consummation. The Eucharist has been variously interpreted and celebrated throughout the history of our communions. We have held different and sometimes opposing views of the sacrament. Nevertheless, we judge that this is a moment when we together ought to look at the relationship between the Eucharist and creation with the hope of discerning how to live on an imperiled planet in a manner consistent with our celebration of the Eucharist.

5. Framing our relationship with creation in light of our Eucharistic practice is a challenging but important task. While the Bible does not link ecology and Eucharist in an explicit manner, the connection is found in our shared historical tradition. Moreover, the theology that underlies our celebration of the Eucharist is integrally related to our ecological stewardship of God's earth. The Eucharist does not take us out of the world. Rather, our celebration of the Eucharist touches the heart of what it means to live on this earth—as we yearn for a new heaven and a new earth, sharing in that future glory even now. The very way in which we celebrate the Eucharist—by using words, gestures, signs, and symbols, all taken from this good earth and from the way humans communicate—offers a fruitful avenue for exploring the theology of creation and redemption, as well as the way in which this sacrament shapes how we live the Christian life.

6. In spite of the ecumenical challenges, the integral relation between Eucharist and creation is not contrived, and may be discerned and developed from the body of existing ecclesial documents which treat each of these topics. Both traditions regard the Eucharist as “the fullest presentation of God's love in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.”⁴ Both traditions have made strong statements of commitment to environmental care and stewardship. The Catholic Church has developed a rich theological perspective on our responsibility for the environment, which is conveyed in the corpus of mid- to late-twentieth century papal and episcopal documents. Among these we point to John Paul II's historic 1990 World Day of Peace Message and the U.S. Catholic bishops' 1991 statement *Renewing the Earth*. The United Methodist Church has issued a number of statements on the importance of caring for the environment. The most authoritative of these is the statement on the natural world found in the Social Principles of the *Book of Discipline*. The most recent is the United Methodist Council of Bishops' 2009 pastoral letter *God's Renewed Creation: Call to Hope and Action*.⁵ The common theme in both Methodist and Catholic statements on the environment is their call to what John Paul II termed

⁴ *Christian Home and Family*, Report of the International Methodist-Catholic Dialogue (Denver, 1971), para. 52.

⁵ The pastoral letter and foundation document can be found at http://www.umc.org/site/c.lwL4KnN1LtH/b.5613639/k.47A9/Gods_Renewed_Creation_Call_to_Hope_and_Action.htm.

an “ecological conversion.” We are called to listen to creation’s groaning (cf. Rom 8:22) and to respond in hope because of the promise of God’s reconciliation of all things in Christ (cf. 2 Cor 5:19).

7. Both traditions have internal resources to support the conjunction of Eucharist and stewardship of creation. The teaching of the church fathers brought these two themes together in rich ways which we do well to recover in our ecclesial communities. For instance, Ambrose of Milan links creation and Eucharist in his mystagogic teachings by making a connection between Christ’s activity both in the creation of the cosmos and in the transformation of the bread and wine into his body and blood.⁶ Benedict XVI has called for a renewal in our understanding of the “indissoluble bond” between the doctrines of creation and redemption.⁷ On the Methodist side, there is a natural connection to be drawn from John Wesley’s theology of Eucharist and creation. The Eucharist is “the grand channel” of God’s grace to humankind.⁸ And humankind is called to be “channels of conveyance” of God’s blessings to the created world.⁹ A theology of Eucharist and creation in a Wesleyan spirit would be one that connects these channels of blessings.

Part II

Creation as the Mystery of Our Origin Encountered

8. For the Eucharist to inform our approach to the human relation to the rest of nature, we need a theological recovery of the doctrine of creation. In our encounter with the natural world, we encounter as well the mystery of our origin, the fundamental relation of all creation to a Creator-God. The term “Eucharist” comes from the Greek word that means “to give thanks.” When we celebrate the Eucharist we give thanks for the very gift of existence. Creation is God’s *first* gift. Creation is the first sign of God’s glory and God’s love. For humans, the world is not simply a stage for human action; our relation to the world, to creation, is constitutive of our very identity as persons.¹⁰ In the Eucharist, we encounter the fullness of Christian revelation, the reality of existence as gift, for the gift of redemption includes the prior gift of creaturely existence. In the Paschal Mystery we remember the relation of all creation to its Creator, the origins of all life in the God Who is Love. The gift of existence precedes even our need for the gift of forgiveness and new life granted through Christ’s sacrifice, the event most clearly remembered and represented in the Eucharist.

9. Our encounter with the mystery of our origins, of the origin of *all creation* in God, invites us to a recognition and continued awareness of the sacramentality of the world. “The principle of sacramentality means that things matter and that matter is not just a thing. Things in the world

⁶ Ambrose, *De sacramentis*, 4.4.14-16

⁷ Benedict XVI, Meeting with Clergy of the Diocese of Bolzano-Bressanone, August 6. Accessed from http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2008/august/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080806_clero-bressanone_en.html on November 20, 2010.

⁸ John Wesley, Sermon 26, “Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, VI”, III.11.

⁹ Cf. John Wesley’s Sermon 60, “The General Deliverance”, I.3.

¹⁰ *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, para. 452.

reveal God with us.”¹¹ “This means that that the world, humans, and all creatures great and small, are signs of God among us.”¹² A vision of the sacramentality of the world engenders the contemplation of God’s glory in God’s creation. The world becomes the theatre of God’s glory, where “all the trees of the forest sing for joy” at the coming of the Lord (Ps 96:12).

10. In conversations between Roman Catholics and Methodists, the principle of sacramentality has begun to emerge as an important area for exploration and discussion. As the Seoul Report states: “Methodists believe, as Catholics do, that we truly cooperate with God’s grace and participate in God’s life. God works through the visible community of the Church and through individuals in it, both pastors and laypeople. There are foundations here for a serious shared exploration of the idea of sacramentality.”¹³ Christ’s presence in the church is the foundation for a sacramental vision of the church. Likewise, Christ’s presence in creation is the foundation for a sacramental vision of the cosmos. It is Christ who shows us fully what it means to live in the constant awareness of the gift of existence, to realize that we have received all that we are from the Father.

11. Gratitude toward God for the gift of creation opens the way for a renewed understanding and appropriation of the work of redemption, and of the unity of God’s work of creation and redemption. We believe in one God, who both creates and redeems. The affirmation of this unity is indispensable for a right understanding of the Eucharist and for human care of the environment. Many dimensions of the environmental crisis can be traced to forgetfulness of this basic fact, articulated by the psalmist so many centuries ago: “Know that the LORD is God! It is he that made us and we are his” (Ps 100:3). When creation is taken for granted, its original relation to God the Creator forgotten, such forgetfulness easily leads to a distorted understanding of the vocation to subdue the earth in the creation account in Genesis. For as John Paul II and Benedict XVI remind us, human dominion “is not an absolute power,”¹⁴ but rather, “a summons to responsibility”¹⁵ which must be ordered by a humble awareness of our dependence on God’s generosity and mercy.

12. At stake in this fundamental posture of gratitude is the fullness of the Christian reception of Christ’s redemption. When Christian formation in the doctrine of creation is inadequate, when creation as “the first and universal witness to God’s all-powerful love”¹⁶ is taken for granted or forgotten by the faithful, this leads to a “diminished” sense of the salvific work of Christ.¹⁷ Also

¹¹ Kevin Irwin, *Models of the Eucharist*, p.43; Cf. John Wesley, Sermon 23, “Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, III”, I.6.

¹² Irwin, p.47; Cf. John Wesley, Sermon 23, “Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, III”, I.11.

¹³ *The Grace Given You in Jesus Christ*, Report of the International Methodist-Catholic Dialogue (Seoul, 2006), para.123. See also paragraphs 102, 103, 132 in the same report.

¹⁴ *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, para. 34.

¹⁵ *World Day of Peace Message*, January 1, 2010

¹⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 288.

¹⁷ Benedict XVI, Meeting with Clergy of the Diocese of Bolzano-Bressanone, August 6, 2008. Accessed from http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2008/august/documents/hf_ben-

diminished is our awareness of the fullness of our identity as persons, for the truth of the human can only be comprehended within the creaturely relations which constitute the wholeness of all creation.

13. Furthermore, a theology—and a sacramental practice—in which this stance of gratitude and wonder before the gift of creation has been lost lacks credibility. There is a transcendental depth in creation which people have sensed throughout the course of human history, and which so often finds preeminent expression through poets, artists, philosophers, and the manifold richness of the world's religions. The integrity of the universal experience of awe and wonder before the mystery of existence is too often overlooked by Christians who themselves have lost this aspect of their own existential and theological heritage. The Christian experience of creation as gift, conveyed and encountered anew in the Eucharist, should yield a still deeper Christian witness to wonder, for nature itself is seen anew as a sacramental encounter with the triune God. Nature is, to Christian eyes, a mystagogy, an instruction in holy mysteries, a leading into the beauty of the Creator.

Part III

Eucharist as the Wholeness of the Christian Mystery Encountered

14. The Christian understanding of creation, our posture of grateful receptivity to God's gift of existence, is deeply formed and informed by our celebration of the Eucharistic liturgy. For in the Eucharist, Christians encounter the whole of the Christian story, the reconciliation of all creatures which is the fruit and the promise of the Paschal Mystery. In the common shape of our worship, certain elements call for special attention: the gathering of the people of God, the proclamation and reception of the word, our communion with the Lord, and the sending in the Spirit.

A. Gathering

15. We gather on Sunday, the first day of the week, the Lord's Day. Sunday is not the only day when Methodists and Catholics celebrate the Eucharist, but the Sunday celebration manifests with particular clarity the cosmic dimension of this sacrament. Sunday, after all, marks the day of the Lord's resurrection, and thus worship on Sunday represents a celebration of the new creation. Sunday is the first day of creation when God said "let there be light," and it is the eighth day which begins a new creation when God raised Jesus Christ, the true light, from the land of the shadow of death. The work of creation that began on the first day and ended on the seventh day of rest receives its ultimate fulfillment on the eighth day, in the Lord's resurrection. The celebration of the Eucharist on Sunday is a prophetic sign that Christ is the Alpha and Omega of all creation. In the midst of a groaning creation there is reason for hope. In the words of John Paul II, "Sunday is the proclamation that time, in which he who is the Risen Lord of history makes his home, is not the grave of our illusions but the cradle of an ever new future, given to us to turn the fleeting moments of life into seeds of eternity."¹⁸

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¹⁸ *Dies Domini*, para. 84.

16. We gather as God's priestly people. The vocation to be a royal priesthood was first entrusted to the people of Israel (cf. Ex 19:6). In the new covenant mediated through Jesus Christ as our "high priest" (Heb 9:11-12), the vocation given to Israel has also been offered to the nations. Like Israel, the church, composed of Jew and Gentile, is called to represent to all humanity its true vocation in the world to be a royal priesthood (1 Pet 2:9). The dignity of the human race is that it is made in the "image" of God to be the royal representative of the ruler of creation by exercising "dominion" over the world (Gen 1:26). This dominion is not a license to exploit the earth, but to [nurture and]care for it, [even] as God does. As God's royal representative, the human race is also called and commissioned to serve as priests on behalf of all creation. This vocation is revealed and made possible through Jesus Christ, who is the union of God and humanity, the one "mediator" between God and us (1 Tim 2:5). By restoring humanity to God, Christ restores our true nature, which includes our role to be the representative of the Creator to creation and the representative of creation to the Creator. Through Christ our high priest we are restored to our vocation in the world as a royal priesthood. John's eschatological vision depicts humanity restored to its vocation as a royal priesthood: a redeemed people "from every tribe and language and people and nation" whom Christ has made "a kingdom and priests" to our God to "reign on earth" (Rev 5:8-10).

17. We gather to praise God. At God's gracious invitation and plan, we live on this earth as his creatures, made in the divine image and likeness. Humans, however, are not the only inhabitants of the earth, for we share this earth with countless animals, plants, trees, rivers, rocks, mountains and oceans. In and through the liturgy we praise God and give thanks for all the earth's creatures, its inhabitants and all that ever has or ever will dwell on it. The very fact that all these things exist means that by their very nature they mirror their creator. All creatures have their own unique voice, and as a uni-verse, creation joins in one chorus of praise. By their very being they give praise to God the maker of heaven and earth. While all created things by their nature offer a continual symphony of praise to God, it is the privilege and responsibility of humans to give shape to that praise by word, song and gesture.¹⁹

18. We gather mindful of both our unity with the natural world and our distinctive vocation and responsibility within it. It may seem presumptuous to ascribe to one creature—on one planet circling a medium-sized star in a universe of billions of galaxies—the role of being the representative of all creation. We are mindful of the immensity of the universe and of its evolution over an awe-inspiring span of time, and we are also keenly aware of humanity's history of abusing nature. Therefore, it is important today to emphasize humanity's unity with the rest of the created universe. Christians remember that *adam* (Adam) was created from *adamah* (the ground). Yet humanity is part of nature in a distinct manner, possessing consciousness, speech, and the capacity to pray. The idea of humanity as a royal priesthood is one way of expressing what is distinctive about human nature and its place in the world. This idea needs to be understood and developed in a form which affirms human distinctiveness without tyranny over nature or a simplistically anthropocentric view of the universe. The human capacity for transcendence in nature is not equivalent to human tyranny over nature. The human

¹⁹ The hymn "All Creatures of Our God and King", a hymn attributed to Saint Francis and shared by both our traditions, expresses humanity's role in leading creation's praise with keen clarity, as the congregation invites all creatures—brother sun, sister moon, and even mother earth—to lift up their voices in singing praise to our God. The hymn text can be found in *The United Methodist Hymnal*, No. 62.

capacity to express the praise of all creation in prayer to the Creator is not a denial of the intrinsic value of non-human creation, but a celebration of other creatures' joy in their own being. In our royal role, we affirm our responsibility on behalf of other creatures with whom we share the web of life. In our priestly role, we affirm that our relationship to nature is spiritual as well as physical.

19. We gather in humility, wonder, and praise. When the church is summoned to "Lift up your hearts," we exercise our role as a royal priesthood. The church stands before God as redeemed humanity, a cosmic creature, a microcosm of the universe, called to mediate the praise of the whole creation to its Creator, and to exercise wise stewardship of the earth and all its creatures. In exercising our priesthood on behalf of all creation, with humility and love we offer adoration, praise, and thanksgiving to our Creator in whom "we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). When we celebrate the Eucharist we join with the rest of Creation in acknowledging our dependence on the Father. Confessing our faith in God, singing praises to the maker of heaven and earth, elicits and requires a humble and reverential bow toward all that exists—including humans—as gifts from God. "Our" Creator is not only humanity's, but the whole world's. Our Creator is the triune God, who out of the superabundance of divine love in the communion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, freely bestows being on that which is not God. Creation itself reflects the sheer giftedness of God's love. The immensity of the universe and the fecundity and diversity of life on planet earth testify to the extravagance of this gift. The beauty of all creation is testimony to the glory of God who created it and to God's joy in creating. Even the terror which the creation evokes in us is a sign of the sublime grandeur of what God has made (Job 40:15). God's faithfulness to the creation is revealed in God's entrance into the creation by the incarnation of the Word and the descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Before this gift, which did not have to be, but is, we are "lost in wonder, love, and praise."²⁰

B. Word

20. As we read in the Epistle to the Hebrews, "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds" (Heb 1:1-2). Catholics and Methodists believe that "The Word has primacy in the Church. The Eternal Logos, through the incarnation, brought God's final revelation to humankind and became the redeemer of the world and the Lord of the Church. The Eternal Word made flesh is the ultimate norm of all the Church's life and doctrine, orienting all that is done and taught in the Church toward the praise and worship of God the Father, by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit."²¹ "The growth of the Church comes about through a continued hearing and assimilation of the Word of God."²²

²⁰ Charles Wesley, "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling," *The United Methodist Hymnal*, No. 384.

²¹ *Speaking the Truth in Love: Teaching Authority among Catholics and Methodists*, Report of the International Methodist-Catholic Dialogue (Brighton, 2001), para. 16.

²² *The Apostolic Tradition*, Report of the International Methodist-Catholic Dialogue (Paris/Singapore, 1991), para. 18.

21. Listening is built into our eucharistic worship in the liturgy of the Word.²³ The sort of listening central to the reading of the Scriptures in worship involves receptivity and attentiveness that results in hearing the Word as a (further) gift that transforms the hearer. This “receptive listening” is very different from the kind of consumerist listening that is oriented toward entertainment or seeking utility. The Jewish tradition of numbering the commandments is instructive in this regard, for the first commandment is the statement, “I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Ex 20:2). Although the notion of commandment implies active “doing” (or “refraining from doing”), at the heart of carrying out the first commandment is simply the “passive action” of receiving and accepting the truth of God’s saving works. Likewise, the Shema so central to daily Jewish worship begins, “Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God is one LORD” (Deut 6:4). Both of these examples underscore the primacy of our listening to divine revelation, of our receptive stance in relation to God. The same emphasis is present in the New Testament. At the transfiguration, the Father instructs the disciples that the appropriate response to the glorification of Jesus is to “listen to him” (Mk 9:7). Paul instructs the Christians at Rome that “faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17).

22. Receptive, obedient listening to the Word is related to our listening to the testimony of creation. In *Confessions*, Augustine reflects upon the fleeting glimpse of the beatific vision that he shared with his mother, Monica, at Ostia. He observes that in Heaven we will hear the Word of God directly; however, Augustine reminds us that in our earthly life creation itself offers its own song of praise which testifies to God as Creator: “Therefore we said: If to anyone the tumult of the flesh has fallen silent, if the images of earth, water, and air are quiescent, if the heavens themselves are shut out and the very soul itself is making no sound and is surpassing itself by no longer thinking about itself...if all language and every sign and everything transitory is silent—for if anyone could hear them, this is what all of them would be saying, ‘We did not make ourselves, we were made by him who abides for eternity’ (Ps 99:3, 5)—if after this declaration they were to keep silence, having directed our ears to him that made them, then he alone would speak not through them but through himself. We would hear his word...Him who in these things we love we would hear in person without their mediation.”²⁴

23. In the song of all creation, we are reminded that we are not the source or cause of our own existence—“We did not make ourselves, we were made by him who abides for eternity”. Moreover, we are challenged to listen to the voice of creation, to receive its divinely-ordained testimony, as it were, for we encounter therein ‘Him who in these things we love’. This receptivity which Augustine enjoins toward creation’s mediation of the Word compels us all the more to the cultivation of an attentive listening in the liturgy of the Word, in which we encounter Scripture’s preeminent mediation of divine revelation. Mindful of creation’s testimony to the very gift of existence, we find ourselves listening to Scripture’s Word in Eucharistic worship with a renewed awareness of the unity of creation and redemption. We are stirred to lift up our hearts to God with gratitude and praise for his mighty deeds in creation and salvation.

²³ Traditionally, Methodists speak of reading, hearing and meditating on the scriptures as a means of grace. Cf. John Wesley, Sermon 16, “The Means of Grace”, II.1.

²⁴ *Confessions*, IX.x.25.

C. Altar Table

24. Central to the act of celebrating the Eucharist is feasting on the bread of life and the cup of salvation in the community of the redeemed. We are continually redeemed and sanctified by what God has given us as gifts—wheat and grapes—by what we have done to them—made bread and wine—so that they are returned to us, by the power of the Spirit, as the body and blood of Jesus Christ. At the altar table we receive food for the journey of life until we see God face to face. In the meantime, the celebration of the Eucharist articulates and shapes how we understand this world, all the gifts of creation and all that dwells on the earth. The Eucharist teaches us to see the world, to revere it, and to inhabit it humbly, justly and prayerfully.

25. At the altar table, we offer to God the things of this good earth so that God will return them for our sanctification. The Catholic prayers at the presentation of the gifts emphasize this connection: “Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received the bread we offer you: fruit of the earth and work of human hands, it will become for us the bread of life. Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received the wine we offer you: fruit of the vine and work of human hands it will become our spiritual drink.”²⁵ In the Eucharist, we use manufactured signs, bread and wine. By using bread and wine we revere both creation and human work. Bread and wine are blessed not only because they are taken from the earth, but also because they are the work of human hands.

26. Our communion with God through the Eucharist, our participation in the work of redemption, is not possible without the work of human hands. Just as nature reveals its divine vocation in the Eucharistic elements, so does human labor. Human flourishing depends on human labor and technology to some degree. Yet the technology that allows human beings to produce food, clothing and shelter also can also give rise to the tower of Babel. And, just as nature itself, after the expulsion from the Garden, no longer unequivocally provides for human flourishing (we get thorns and thistles and snakebites along with the good), likewise human technology can obscure the divinely-ordained vocation. Bread and wine are necessary for the Eucharist, but wheat and grapes may come from oppressive agricultural practices. Nevertheless, a vigorous Eucharistic theology and practice would require us to care about agricultural practices, and not only for wheat and grapes. Because bread and wine are manufactured, the issues of safe and suitable work environments and just wages are at the heart of the church's social justice concerns as derived from our Eucharistic practice. As Paul declares, we are to witness to God in Christ “reconciling the world (*kosmos*) to himself, not counting their trespasses against them” (2 Cor 5:18).

27. At the altar table in both communions, prayers of thanksgiving are offered to God for the work of creation. The prayer for the Great Thanksgiving in the United Methodist service of Word and Table I begins by stating that “It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to [God], the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.”²⁶ In the Preface for Thanksgiving Day, Methodists pray “By your appointment the seasons come and go. You bring forth bread from the earth and create the fruit of the vine. You formed us in your

²⁵ Accessed from <http://www.usccb.org/romanmissal/samples-priest-gifts.shtml> on April 11, 2011.

²⁶ *The United Methodist Hymnal*, p.7.

image and made us stewards of your world. Earth has yielded its treasure, and from your hand we have received blessing on blessing.”²⁷ The Preface to Catholic Eucharistic Prayer IV is equally explicit: “It is truly right to give you thanks, truly just to give you glory, Father, most holy, for you are the one God living and true, existing before all ages and abiding for all eternity, dwelling in unapproachable light; yet you, who alone are good, the source of life, have made all that is, so that you might fill your creatures with blessings and bring joy to many of them by the glory of your light.”²⁸ It is in wonder at the glory of God that worshippers join with the angels in praising God and “giving voice to every creature under heaven.”²⁹ Eucharistic Prayer IV goes on to praise God who “fashioned all [his] works in wisdom and in love” and “formed man in [his] own image and entrusted the whole world to his care, so that in serving [God] alone, the Creator, he might have dominion over all creatures.”³⁰

28. By giving thanks to the Creator for all of creation in the preface of the Eucharistic prayer, the Church celebrates the cosmic scope of God’s plan of salvation. While God’s redemptive purpose revealed in Jesus Christ is directed toward human beings made in God’s image, it is not limited to us, but encompasses all of creation. The apostle Paul eloquently expressed the cosmic scope of God’s salvation when he wrote that the whole creation “waits with eager longing” for its liberation from “futility” which it will obtain by “the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Rom 8:18-25). The Gospel of Jesus Christ promises not only the redemption of human hearts and history, but also the redemption of the whole creation so that it may be liberated from the bondage of death and for its transformation into a new creation. Indeed, Ambrose of Milan suggests that at the end of time, creation will join human beings in the beatific vision: “Those who have the first fruits of the Spirit are groaning in expectation of the adoption of sons (cf. Rom 8:23). The adoption of sons is that of the whole body of creation, when it will be, as it were, a son of God and see the divine, eternal goodness face to face.”³¹ Thus, as we celebrate the Eucharist, remembering the death and resurrection of Christ and awaiting his coming in glory, we cannot forget that all of creation is intimately joined to us in longing for the final consummation of Christ’s redemptive work. In the Eucharistic liturgy we remember that creation is bound to futility because of sin. We remember the vulnerability of species to extinction, the fragility of ecosystems, and human suffering, especially the suffering of the poor on account of human greed. We also remember that the God who creates is also the God who saves and through Christ, “God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross” (Col 1:20). The Eucharist gives us a foretaste of the redemption for which all of nature groans. As the Wesleys expressed in poetry, the earth itself longs for, indeed thirsts for, the salvation given in Christ:

In this howling wilderness
On Calvary’s steep top,
Made a curse our souls to bless

²⁷ *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, p.76.

²⁸ Accessed from <http://www.usccb.org/romanmissal/samples-priest-prayer4.shtml> on April 11, 2011.

²⁹ Accessed from <http://www.usccb.org/romanmissal/samples-priest-prayer4.shtml> on April 11, 2011.

³⁰ Accessed from <http://www.usccb.org/romanmissal/samples-priest-prayer4.shtml> on April 11, 2011.

³¹ Ambrose, “Epistle” 35.13 (*Patrologia Latina* 16.1081A).

Thou once was lifted up;
Stricken there by Moses' rod,
Wounded with a deadly blow;
Gushing streams of life o'erflowed
The thirsty world below.³²

D. Sending

29. We are sent from the Eucharist conformed to the mystery of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection. We are sent as Christian disciples in and for the world, bearing witness to our encounter with God's love made known in Christ. Benedict XVI's words express our common conviction, that "faith, worship, and ethos are interwoven into a single reality which takes shape in our encounter with God's agape.... A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented."³³ We believe that the "Eucharist opens up the vision of the divine rule which has been promised as the final renewal of creation, and is a foretaste of it."³⁴ "The Eucharist thus signifies what the world is to become: an offering and hymn of praise to the Creator, a universal communion in the body of Christ, a kingdom of justice, love, and peace in the Holy Spirit."³⁵ In this sacramental perspective, Christians are called to realize the "Eucharistic form of life"³⁶ which Jesus Christ embodied—Christ, in whom the mystery and fullness of our humanity is revealed and therein our "most high calling."³⁷

30. We are sent from the altar table in the regenerative power of the Holy Spirit. Methodists traditionally speak of the crucial role of the tempers and Catholics speak of infused virtues in the Christian's growth in holiness. These seeds of sanctifying grace are sown in our hearts by God and nurtured by participation in the Eucharist. In this connection it is appropriate to speak of "environmental virtues" and "environmental vices." Environmental virtues rightly order our passions so that we can see God in all things and act in ways which order all things to God; environmental vices sinfully close our eyes to God's presence in the least of our brothers and sisters in the created order. John Wesley regarded the virtue of the pure heart as essential for discerning God's presence in the world. Wesley states that "The pure in heart see all things full of God. They see Him in the firmament of heaven; in the moon, walking in brightness; in the sun, when he rejoiceth as a giant to run his course. They see Him 'making the clouds his chariots, and walking upon the wings of the wind.' They see Him 'preparing rain for the earth, and blessing the increase of it; giving grass for the cattle, and green herb for the use of man.' They see the Creator of all, wisely governing all, and 'upholding all things by the word of his

³² *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*, No.27.

³³ *Deus caritas est*, para. 14.

³⁴ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Geneva, 1982), p.14.

³⁵ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, p.11.

³⁶ *Sacramentum caritatis*, para. 92.

³⁷ *Gaudium et spes*, para. 22.

power.”³⁸ The opposite to the temper of purity of heart Wesley called practical atheism. The vice which habitually closes the eyes of the heart to the presence of God in the other is a sign of sinful blindness. The remedy for this malady is not primarily the study of natural philosophy (though clearly Wesley valued this branch of science as a first step) but stirring the grace within us by engaging in virtuous actions.

31. We are sent in an “integral and solidary humanism,”³⁹ seeking to contribute to the renewal of society in light of the ecological crisis, but also mindful of the part which Christians have played in the complex unfolding of culture in its relation to the natural world. Conformed to Christ through sharing in the mystery of communion, Christians must not dismiss or caricature varieties of environmentalism, but should seek to understand and learn from them, whenever possible, as a social movement which is a sign of the times. Often their moral aspirations reflect dimensions of the Christian experience which have been diminished and which stand in need of renewal. The history of environmental concern confronts us with authentic intuitions of spiritual meaning expressed in wonder before nature’s beauty and mystery, and longing for a more harmonious relation between natural ecology and human ecology. In this regard, the environmental movement itself can be a sign calling the churches to a renewal of its own core commitments and practices. We should not forget that some of the most seminal voices of modern American environmentalism were formed in Christian contexts. That so many representatives of the environmental movement rejected institutional expressions of Christianity should serve as a salutary reminder and warning to the church. When salvation is only extrinsically or instrumentally related to the universal human experience of creation, the credibility of the Christian gospel is compromised. It is only from and with this vision of the whole, of the unity of creation and redemption that Christians truly offer renewal to society, the redemption for which creation groans.

32. We are sent from the Eucharist as witnesses to hope, wholeness and meaning in a world overwhelmed by anxiety and ravaged by ecological degradation. From the renewing encounter with the crucified and risen Christ, we go into the world in the strength of the Holy Spirit, offering to others that abundant life which Jesus promised (cf. Jn 10:10), an experience of the unity of reality in its origins, its unfolding, and its destiny. This is the “good news” of our Christian witness. We depart from the Eucharistic celebration more deeply formed in the experience of the mystery of divine love which compels us to abide in wonder, receptivity, humility, and gratitude—before the ever-greater God, and the grace-filled encounter with each person, every creature.

Conclusion

33. We call both Methodists and Catholics to participate more deeply in the Eucharist by recognizing its intrinsic connection with the renewal of creation. The Eucharist is regarded as the central form of Christian worship because it orchestrates all that humans are and can be on this earth—our senses, abilities, talents, gifts, and intelligence—and offers them back to God the Father in thanksgiving for the paschal victory of his Son. However, the power of the Eucharist

³⁸ John Wesley, Sermon 23, “Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, III”, I.6.

³⁹ *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, “Introduction.”

to form and transform our relationship to creation will be lost if the sacrament is not celebrated regularly and attended faithfully.⁴⁰

34. We call both Methodists and Catholics to attend more carefully to the production of the sacramental bread and wine both in itself and as a sign of the interconnection of worship, economy and nature. To participate in the Eucharist without discerning these interconnections is the result of indolence and may lead to diminished communion with the Lord. Roman Catholics can affirm the United Methodist document “This Holy Mystery” when it states that “receiving the bread and wine as products of divine creation reminds us of our duties of stewardship of the natural environment in a time when destruction and pollution imperil the earth, and unjust distribution of the planet’s resources destroys the hopes and lives of millions.”⁴¹ Such remembrance might carry specific implications for our celebration of the Eucharist. It is appropriate that the Church’s worship include concern for the economic conditions and environmental impact of the production of the sacramental elements. For instance, the use of locally grown grains and grapes may be of significance in this regard.

35. Finally, we call both Methodists and Catholics to practice stewardship of creation in a manner that insists on the relation between the church’s *lex orandi* and *lex vivendi*—its way of praying and its way of living. There are important connections between partaking of the Lord’s Supper and Christian discipleship. As the meal of those who are at peace with one another, the Eucharist calls its participants to be ambassadors of reconciliation. The Church witnesses to God’s *shalom* in its proclamation of the gospel, and in its service in the world, and also in a special way in the Eucharist. After all, both Methodists and Catholics believe that the “link within worship, especially between the Eucharist and the Christian life (‘namely our life of service as Christ’s body in the world’), is essential in both churches.”⁴² Eucharistic renewal and environmental responsibility are intrinsically linked. Separating them yields an incomplete and distorted “sending,” that is to say, a diminished evangelical witness to the glory of God. A Christian response to the ecological crisis, to environmental degradation and environmental injustice, is adequate only when informed by a sense of wonder before God’s gift of creation. The Eucharist evokes this sense of wonder when we join with the choirs of angels and all the company of heaven, indeed with all of creation, singing,

Holy, holy, holy, LORD, God of power and might,
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.
Hosanna in the Highest.

⁴⁰ For United Methodists the call to more regular and faithful participation echoes the recommendations of “This Holy Mystery: A United Methodist Understanding of Holy Communion” which encourage United Methodist “to move toward a richer sacramental life, including weekly celebration of the Lord’s Supper at the services on the Lord’s Day”. Accessed from <http://gatewayumc.org/pdf/hcfinal2.pdf> on July 7, 2011.

⁴¹ Accessed from <http://gatewayumc.org/pdf/hcfinal2.pdf> on April 11, 2011.

⁴² *Methodist Catholic Dialogues: Thirty Years of Mission and Witness*, p.24. Accessed from <http://www.usccb.org/seia/methcath.pdf> on July 7, 2011.