

5-3-2019

## Who Shall Be Welcome in God's Tent: Disrupting the Liturgical Legacies of White Supremacy to Promote the Flourishing of the Body of Christ

Andrew Remick

*College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University, aremick001@csbsju.edu*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/obsculta>



Part of the [Ethics in Religion Commons](#), [History of Christianity Commons](#), [Liturgy and Worship Commons](#), and the [Practical Theology Commons](#)

ISSN: 2472-2596 (print)

ISSN: 2472-260X (online)

---

### Recommended Citation

Remick, Andrew. 2019. Who Shall Be Welcome in God's Tent: Disrupting the Liturgical Legacies of White Supremacy to Promote the Flourishing of the Body of Christ. *Obsculta* 12, (1) : 60-77.

<https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/obsculta/vol12/iss1/7>.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@CSB/SJU. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Obsculta* by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@CSB/SJU. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@csbsju.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@csbsju.edu).

## Andrew Remick

Andrew J. Remick, a native of Rochester, Minnesota, is pursuing a Master of Theological Studies degree with a concentration in liturgy. He also holds a Master of Arts degree in Architectural History and a Bachelor's degree in history. His interest in the intersection of liturgy and ethics derives from a desire to promote a more inclusive church that authentically honors the varied gifts of all its members and the diverse ways we can encounter and worship God through sacred song, story, and ritual. He intends to serve in campus ministry after he completes his degree in the summer of 2019.

## WHO SHALL BE WELCOME IN GOD'S TENT: *Disrupting the Liturgical Legacies of White Supremacy to Promote the Flourishing of the Body of Christ*

In the Psalms, there is a small genre known as entrance liturgies that capture exchanges between temple officials and pilgrims seeking admission into God's sanctuary. In Psalms 15 and 24, the sojourner inquires about entering the Divine presence in various ways: Who may dwell on God's mountain? Who may abide in God's tent? Who may be in God's holy place? In both psalms, the official's response outlines a series of ethical provisions about personal conduct and the just treatment of one's neighbors. Psalm 15 suggests ten actions, which some scripture scholars identify as echoing the Ten Commandments.<sup>1</sup> These actions describe a person who walks blamelessly and does what is righteous, who does not utter slander and honors those who fear the Lord as worthy to enter God's presence. In the New Testament, Jesus's teaching about love of God and love of neighbor as the Greatest Commandments, such as in Mark 12:28-34, also alludes to the connection between devotion to God and treatment of others seen in the Psalms and further emphasizes how honoring the neighbor is the foremost way of loving God.

While these Scripture passages focus on personal behavior, the ethical expectations can also be applied to the church corporately as the Body of Christ. Like individual believers, the church over time has struggled to understand and fulfill the standards of behavior delineated in Old and New Testaments. Specifically, it has been influenced by the oppressive practices instituted and perpetuated by some of its members that privilege one ethnic, racial, or cultural group at the expense of others. Marginalization occurring within the Body of Christ wounds the entire church. In particular, it diminishes the ability of the Christian community to express its love for God,

---

1 Richard J. Clifford, SJ, *Psalms 1-72*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2002), 92.

the Creator of all, through worship due to the failure of the church collectively to show the reverence due to every person as a neighbor and a child of God worthy of love.

As the church in the United States increasingly reflects the diversity of the world church, liturgical ministers and congregations encounter the challenge and opportunity of authentically embracing the richness and beauty of the global church's panoply of cultures in worship. To achieve this goal, though, will mean the acknowledging and dismantling historical and new liturgical and sacramental habits that contribute to maintaining white, Eurocentric supremacy as well as other forms of oppression present in American congregations. The ecclesial Body of Christ, which the church's worship and sacraments assemble, nourish, and sustain, suffers and cannot flourish when the church's liturgical praxis supports unjust social norms instead of disrupting harmful practices. Contesting and overturning customs that have corrupted worship for generations is neither simple nor quickly accomplished. Nevertheless, ongoing honest scrutiny and intentional reform of the way Christians pray together are necessary for the church to thrive.

This paper will first explore philosopher Lisa Tessman's work on how virtue ethics serves a lens to understand flourishing in the context of oppression. Her study valuably demonstrates how repression constrains flourishing and, she crucially notes, impacts both the afflicted and the afflicter.<sup>2</sup> Second, by drawing on the scholarship of theologians Traci C. West, M. Shawn Copeland, and Katie Walker Grimes, this paper will examine how systems or instances of prejudice—specifically slavery and white supremacy—have harmed Christian liturgical and sacramental life in the United States. While all three scholars raise several significant issues that have adversely impacted the way the church worships in their research, this paper will focus on four—denying the historical and contemporary factors that shape liturgy, the corruption of sacramental integrity, a distorted view of our relationships

---

2 Lisa Tessman, *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 26, 75-76.

with God and neighbor, and treating Eurocentric sources as universal. Lastly, this essay will then consider their recommendations for counteracting oppressive liturgical habits.

Working within the Aristotelian virtue ethics tradition, Tessman cites one of its central tenets, writing, “moral goodness is necessary—though importantly, not sufficient—for flourishing,” underscoring the formidable connection between a person’s moral circumstances and the ability to live well.<sup>3</sup> In considering this principle in the context of oppression, she argues that that subjugation injures a person’s “chances of developing a good or virtuous character,” and this moral damage ultimately reduces one’s capacity to flourish.<sup>4</sup> In addition to the personal consequences, Tessman highlights the unjust external barriers that arise from oppressive structures and hinder an individual’s potential “to gain or be granted freedom, material resources, political power, and respect or social recognition of personhood—all of which are needed to live well.”<sup>5</sup> Taking account of the interior and exterior impacts of injustice that inhibit persons, and, by extension, the communities they comprise, to holistically develop and thrive, Tessman cogently establishes a framework for understanding oppression’s detrimental ramifications on flourishing.

Tessman expands her study of virtue ethics in oppressive contexts by examining how social circumstances are an essential component of flourishing. She first affirms Aristotle’s insistence that individual flourishing occurs within and is dependent upon one’s environment.<sup>6</sup> Contrasting current approaches to virtue ethics that tend to focus on the individual apart from social context, Tessman argues that a person’s communal circumstances as crucial for determining whether people can truly flourish if their status derives from systems of oppression.<sup>7</sup> Given the importance of moral goodness

---

3 Tessman, 11.

4 Tessman, 12.

5 Tessman, 26.

6 Tessman, 58.

7 Tessman, 60-61.

as a requirement for flourishing, capitalizing on the repression of others would limit one's capacity for flourishing. However, Tessman observes, benefitting from the subordination of others was not always a concern in traditional Aristotelian virtue ethics. While Aristotle contended that one's well-being was contingent upon the welfare of the social collective, she notes that he did not envision an inclusive community.<sup>8</sup> Aristotle's consideration of the relationship between moral goodness, societal conditions, and flourishing failed to take into account the complexity of the society individuals inhabit and excluded marginalized members. Therefore, Tessman adapts Aristotle's ideas to develop a more inclusionary understanding of the social context that undergirds one's flourishing. She directly connects an individual's flourishing to the well-being of not only one's socioeconomic peers, but all members of the community, especially "those whose very lack of well-being" supports another person's privileged status.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, by stressing the need for an inclusive society that fosters everyone's flourishing, Tessman powerfully illustrates how the moral damage of oppression affects both the marginalized and those upheld by unjust systems.

Admittedly, Tessman's study of moral character formation in the context of oppression is not expressly concerned with ecclesial communities or their members. Nevertheless, her insights valuably frame the ethical issues at stake in considering the racial and cultural aspects of worship and how they either perpetuate or contest forms of oppression, which impacts the ability of the Body of Christ to flourish. To explore more specific examples of how oppression and injustice corrupt liturgical and sacramental rituals and their concomitant effects on the People of God we turn to the work of theologians Traci West, M. Shawn Copeland, and Katie Grimes. All three of these scholars examine how white cultural dominance or supremacy along with what Grimes describes as antiblackness supremacy in the United States has infiltrated and corroded

---

8 Tessman, 73-74.

9 Tessman, 75-76.

Christian worship and sacramental rituals. Their work compellingly demonstrates how the systemic and cultural legacies of slavery and white supremacy formed racist habits that continue to shape liturgy.

Both West and Grimes note that one of the significant challenges for dismantling components of liturgical celebrations that reflect racial prejudices is simply acknowledging the impact of historical circumstances on worship practices. West observes that Christians frequently resist interrogating their worship practices for racially and socioeconomically conditioned features because doing so threatens the belief in the universal quality of Christian worship that is thought to be immune from past or present societal influences.<sup>10</sup> This perspective encourages congregants “to pretend that race and culture do not matter in this worship space,” which results in “practicing one of the major characteristics upholding white privilege: denial.”<sup>11</sup> Viewing worship practices as universal, unaffected by the time and place where they either originated or are currently enacted, prevents meaningful scrutiny of how they maintain white dominance. Even official documents from the Catholic Church at times have contributed to this perspective. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Vatican II’s Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, for example, describes the earthly liturgy as “a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy.”<sup>12</sup> While this is true, it is vital that today’s believers do not ignore the reality of worship occurring in a particular place and time from which it is not easily separated and that has inevitably shaped it.

In discussing Baptism and Eucharist, Grimes also observes the impacts of where Christians reside on the church’s sacramental practices. She describes the corporate Body of Christ into which these rituals initiate believers as “at once solid and porous,” since these sacraments “build the body of Christ, but they do not seal it off from the world.”<sup>13</sup> She

---

10 Traci C. West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics: When Racism and Women’s Lives Matter* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006) 124-125.

11 West, 125.

12 Second Vatican Council, “Sacrosanctum Concilium: Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy,” in *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P. (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1996), § 8, p. 121.

13 Katie Walker Grimes, *Christ Divided* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2017), 201.

recounts several examples of white Catholics in Chicago and other northern cities in the years after slavery antagonistically guarding their parishes against integration.<sup>14</sup> Grimes persuasively shows that the sacraments of initiation these Catholics shared failed to form a cohesive body across racial lines, nor did they provide a countersign to the prevailing norms of segregation and prejudice. Hence, the church, as the Body of Christ, all too often has reflected rather than contested the oppressive systems of white dominance found elsewhere in society. As Grimes notes, “white Catholics bring their racialized bodies with them when they form a parish, ingest the Eucharist, or process into the streets in celebration of a patron saint’s feast day.”<sup>15</sup> Contrary to the widespread desire to view Christians and their worship as in the world but not of it, West and Grimes illustrate how discriminatory attitudes present in the broader society enter into parishes and congregations through the human beings who inhabit them.

A second threat to the flourishing of the Body of Christ is the corruption of the effects of the sacraments due to contact with unjust social systems. M. Shawn Copeland’s formidable study of the Eucharist in the context of white racist supremacy examines the significance of the sacrament’s origins in the broken body of Jesus, the solidarity it is intended to foster, and the sacrament’s place within a society shaped by the legacy of slavery and racism.<sup>16</sup> For Copeland, the Eucharist is not only a sign but also a catalyst that forms those who partake in it into a body within humankind that strives to be “a counter-sign to the encroaching reign of sin” by extending the message and actions of Jesus’s life and ministry.<sup>17</sup> Due to the wicked commodification and dehumanization of black bodies, Copeland identifies slavery along with the racist efforts to maintain white dominance after its abolition as an affront to the Eucharist and the social order it seeks to cultivate. After recalling accounts of abuse endured by enslaved persons who sought

---

14 Grimes, 198-201.

15 Grimes, 201.

16 M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 110.

17 Copeland, 109.



freedom and the terrorizing of black people through violence, especially lynching, she asserts that “the idolatrous practices of slavery, lynching, and white racist supremacy violate black bodies, blaspheme against God, and defame the body of Christ. Such intrinsic evil threatens the communion (*communio*) that is the mediation and the fruit of Eucharist.”<sup>18</sup> Copeland compellingly shows that white supremacist oppression encumbers the Eucharist’s capacity to nurture the unity of the body of Christ as it contends with a culture steeped in fomenting the division of bodies by race, gender, and other demarcations of difference. Her study urges Christians to recognize the struggle that exists between the virtuous order embodied by Christ’s self-gift in the Eucharist and the vicious disorder engendered through slavery, lynching, and racism. The sacraments can indeed formidably oppose the marginalization of people in society. However, the faithful must be cognizant that they cannot always effect justice in and of themselves because of the moral shortcomings of their human recipients. Hence, they also serve as calls to action to those who receive them, which Copeland describes as Eucharistic solidarity, and will be discussed further below.

As part of her study of antiblack prejudice within the Catholic Church, Grimes’s exploration of sacramental practices during the antebellum era indicates that these rituals “lacked the power to disrupt the church’s idolatrous attachment to antiblackness supremacy.”<sup>19</sup> Her most compelling evidence for this assertion is that the sacraments often functioned differently for their black and white recipients. First, she notes how enslaved Africans and their descendants, were baptized without consent. The sacrament, in turn, separated them from their native cultures and eliminated their individual identities, thus “consolidating them into a single racial type” and enforcing dependency upon their masters.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, in the context of slavery and antiblackness, baptism failed to confer the same liberty and dignity

---

18 Copeland, 124-125.

19 Grimes, 187.

20 Grimes, 190-191, 193.

to black recipients as it offered to white recipients.<sup>21</sup> Emancipation after being baptized rarely occurred, and when it did, Grimes argues, it was not because of a person's new Christian identity; instead it was the product of the slave owner's generosity.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, one's ability to fully actualize baptismal dignity became a privilege linked to race, and such limits had ramifications both during and after slavery.

A longstanding principle of the Catholic sacramental theology situates baptism as the gateway to other sacraments. In practice, though, Grimes chronicles instances of blocking free and enslaved blacks from partaking in the rites and sacraments of vocation despite their baptism.<sup>23</sup> After slavery's demise, the corrupting effects of antiblackness on the rituals of Christian initiation remained, as baptismal certificates were unable to overcome the segregation policies that barred black Catholics from Catholic schools, hospitals, or religious orders.<sup>24</sup> Instead of combatting the vicious antiblack practices forged in slavery and continued through segregation and white supremacy, Grimes demonstrates how the society that surrounds the sacraments frequently constrains their fruitfulness. She incisively observes that precisely because it is a body, composed of human beings, the Church "will always be susceptible to the habituating power of the world it inhabits. In performing its body-shaping practices while residing within the spatial afterlife of slavery, the church becomes not only what it does, but also where it lives."<sup>25</sup>

In examining how the foundational Christian sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist coexist with the oppressive systems of slavery, white supremacy, and antiblackness, Copeland and Grimes stress the powerful capacity of these sacraments to establish a social order, a collective body, oriented toward liberation, dignity, and kinship. These are dispositions well suited to cultivating a flourishing, inclusive

---

21 Grimes, 193.

22 Grimes, 193.

23 Grimes, 194-195.

24 Grimes, 198.

25 Grimes, 219.

ecclesial community. However, as these scholars also illustrate, in a society with deeply entrenched forces that thrive on marginalization and division, these sacraments could not dismantle injustice alone due to being co-opted into oppressive systems that maintained white dominance. Once again, the Christian tradition and its rites operated as parts of this world, not merely in it. As a result, the Body of Christ was unable to contest the sinful culture around it due to the ethical deficiencies of some of its members who were shaped by and participated in society's prevailing habits of white supremacy. In this context, the Christian community could not fulfill the vision promised by the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist of a unified and thriving body of people across racial and social boundaries.

To examine the third challenge, we return to Traci West's work, who identifies customs that obscure the relational dependence between social groups as another hazard to overcoming white dominance and the practices that sustain it in worship. Christian worship rightly encourages the participants to recognize humans' dependence on and need for God, which she notes can refute presumptions about self-made success and status. However, especially within predominantly white, socioeconomically elite congregations, this perspective can be problematic if it becomes paired with a worldview that believes blessings are distributed within a divinely ordained system of haves and have-nots.<sup>26</sup> West suggests practices such as prayer intentions that implore God to "touch us so that we may touch others" can inadvertently conceal political and economic power dynamics at work in systems that preserve extant status and privilege.<sup>27</sup> Indeed using such language frames blessings as flowing in one direction from God, to the worthy children of God, to others in need.<sup>28</sup>

Moreover, praying this way does not prompt church members to critically examine their position of social dominance and recognize how their benefits often stem from systems that exploit others, such

---

26 West, 126-127.

27 West, 127.

28 West, 119, 126.

as unfair labor practices in the production of clothing or food. West, therefore, fittingly argues that “especially for predominantly white faith communities, liturgical acknowledgment of dependence upon both God and upon other people could lead to an awakening, instigating a cognizance of the rituals of white dominance in the broader community in which they also participate.”<sup>29</sup> Given the interplay between worship and the morals of the broader culture, it is clear that what happens outside the church should be in dialogue with rituals occurring inside the church. Consequently, it becomes all the more important to develop worship practices that contest prevailing narratives of racial and economic dominance to encourage believers to adopt a more honest and equitable understanding of how they relate to God and neighbor.

The final liturgical challenge to fostering a flourishing Body of Christ this paper will consider is the dominant presence of ritual sources that originate in white, Euro-American traditions and how they fit within the cultural landscape of worship. The primary hazard that West identifies with ritual practices and sacred music from white, Western sources is the tendency to view them as universal. This contributes to what she describes as a “stranglehold of European influences...in most Western Christian liturgy and hymnody.”<sup>30</sup> In contrast, non-western resources are more likely to be defined by their culture of origin and considered out of the ordinary. Furthermore, this echoes an example of the presumption West mentions in discussing instances of white privilege, which sets white, European culture as the norm and only features outside of that tradition need to be culturally specified.<sup>31</sup> She underscores this bias with the example of British hymn writer Charles Wesley, whose compositions of are conventionally treated as universal resources for worship, having transcended their original context of eighteenth-century England.<sup>32</sup>

---

29 West, 127; emphasis original.

30 West, 131.

31 West, 118.

32 West, 131.

Church music scholar, C. Michael Hawn, also notes the problematic impact of treating Western liturgical resources as universal by recalling a story from a conference of Asian Christians he attended in Malaysia. He recounts participants' frustrations at the conflict they felt between their spiritual and cultural identities, mainly due to the influence of Euro-American music and liturgical practices imported by missionaries that remain prevalent in their worship, but create barriers to expressing their faith through native artistic traditions.<sup>33</sup> Both West and Hawn cogently show how the Western canon of sacred music and ritual exists in the church essentially unexamined as emerging from a particular cultural background. Moreover, its features are applied as the standard to evaluate the quality of other practices. Even though the Body of Christ encompasses a diverse, global church, many faith communities continue to privilege and maintain a commitment to white, Eurocentric features in worship, thereby diminishing the vitality of the Body.

Studying this issue is not intended as a critique of the particular musical and ritual traditions that have emerged from Europeans and their descendants around the world. Rather, it draws attention to the custom of treating it as the norm and only considering the ethnic or linguistic context of elements that originate in a different part of the world. While many venerable liturgical traditions of Christianity developed throughout Europe over the centuries, in today's church that fact too frequently resulted in European practices being given pride of place within the liturgy. For more than a century, this attitude the Catholic Church's documents on worship have promoted Gregorian chant and Renaissance polyphony as the premier forms of sacred music and underscore the centrality of classical instruments such as the organ.<sup>34</sup> Several of the documents encourage utilizing local musical traditions in the liturgy, however, by describing these European traditions as the preeminent examples of sacred music they nevertheless complicate

---

33 C. Michael Hawn, "Reverse Missions: Global Singing for Local Congregations," in *Music in Christian Worship*, ed. Charlotte Kroeker (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005), 100.

34 *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, §116, §118, p. 154; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship* (Washington, D.C.: USCCB Publishing, 2007), § 72, p. 22; §87, p. 27.

incorporating multicultural customs into worship. To begin contesting the hold of white, Euro-American liturgical traditions, congregations and their ministers need to acknowledge the cultural background of all components of the liturgy, not only the ones considered exotic. By doing so, they interrupt the habit of treating a historically dominant tradition's features as normative. Furthermore, this practice creates space within worship for incorporating elements from other cultures and encountering their spiritual perspectives, which in turn cultivates a fuller actualization of the Body of Christ.

While it is not an exhaustive selection of issues that are detrimental to the flourishing of the Body of Christ, the four discussed here—ignoring historical influences, weakening sacramental integrity, distorting our relationships with God and neighbor, and relying on an Eurocentric canon—prompt urgent reflection and action to dismantle habits of white dominance and supremacy that have shaped Christian worship. Where should such reflection and action begin? In addition to outlining threats to the Body, scholars West, Copeland, and Grimes offer guidance for how to respond to these risks through being attentive not only to specific liturgical practices but also how they shape the ethical vision of believers in worship and beyond.

West suggests adopting a multicultural approach to worship as one path to disrupting the unjust liturgical habits shaped by white supremacy. She begins her description of this methodology by acknowledging that great “potential for change lies in the fact that choices are always made about appropriate elements for worship.”<sup>35</sup> Indeed in considering the myriad decisions made in the course of planning a liturgy she asserts that “choices are made about how public, communal expressions of Christian worship nurture or challenge existing mores about white dominance.”<sup>36</sup> Although the features of worship may be more predetermined in certain denominations than others, e.g., having a set lectionary of readings,

---

35 West, 134.

36 West, 134.

options remain for attributes such as music selections, prayer intentions, and preaching that can affirm the goodness of human diversity as well as promote habits of resisting injustice.<sup>37</sup>

While fostering culturally diverse expressions of faith is a crucial step to undoing and contesting commitments to white supremacy found within worship, West cautions that this method of preparing liturgy “is not necessarily an indication that racism is being addressed.”<sup>38</sup> Unless liturgy connects with believers’ real lives in the world, even a well-executed multicultural worship service cannot sincerely contest unjust situations. Rituals must prick the conscience of the congregants and encourage them to examine how their choices about race and power contribute to sustaining oppressive systems to effect change.<sup>39</sup> As sacramental theologian Louis-Marie Chauvet cogently asserts in describing the real-life implications of symbolic actions and gestures in the liturgy, they are “not supposed to replace the real, which must be lived all week.”<sup>40</sup> Thus, congregations cannot let a culturally diverse approach to their liturgy, as constructive as it is, mask the necessary work for justice that must be achieved by resisting and disturbing white dominance both inside and outside the church.

To promote a renewed bond between liturgy and ethics that contests the habits of white dominance and antiblack supremacy, Grimes proposes three ways of altering the celebration and consumption of the Eucharist that fosters more morally and sacramentally integrated liturgies. First, she contends, “the church must perform the Eucharist in a strategically spatially subversive fashion of Jesus.”<sup>41</sup> Grimes encourages sacramental and liturgical practices which bring people together that social conventions would separate. Such approaches

---

37 West, 134.

38 West, 136.

39 West, 137.

40 Louis-Marie Chauvet, *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body*, trans. Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), 102.

41 Grimes, 233.

would defy prevailing values by seeking out Jesus's presence among the marginalized and more explicitly reveal what Jesus meant when he said he would be found among the least, the last, and the lost.<sup>42</sup>

In her second approach, Grimes highlights the inconsistency of expecting the Eucharist to effect change in the world, when it does not achieve it in the liturgy.<sup>43</sup> This is not downplaying the transformational power of the Eucharist. Instead, it again recognizes that symbolic actions must correspond to lived experiences. Grimes compellingly observes that the Eucharist cannot effectively foster table fellowship across racial boundaries and actualize the Body of Christ when Catholics "remain parochially and residentially segregated."<sup>44</sup> To counter the legacy of spatial division, white believers especially must first be cognizant of how policies, e.g., preferential loan procedures, and individual choices, e.g., white flight, divided and diminished the unity of Christ's Body. Then it is necessary to enact a counter-narrative that assembles the spatially separated faithful together around the same Eucharistic table to break down barriers and forge bonds of fellowship through shared space and authority in the liturgy as well as beyond it.<sup>45</sup>

Grimes's third recommendation for refining Eucharistic habits draws on Paul's instruction to the Christians at Corinth (1 Corinthians 11:29) to discern the body. In interpreting this exhortation, though, she stresses the need for liturgical celebrations that are attentive to the well-being of the entire ecclesial Body of Christ, rather than being primarily concerned with only the sacramental body and one's moral state.<sup>46</sup> Accounting for the condition of the church's corporate body as an integral component of rituals prompts the faithful to adopt a larger perspective that encompasses more than personal and parochial circumstances. Furthermore, Grimes argues, discerning the body in this manner could strengthen habits of solidarity among co-religionists by

---

42 Grimes, 233, 231.

43 Grimes, 233.

44 Grimes, 233.

45 Grimes, 233-234.

46 Grimes 229.



identifying factors that harm the unity of the Body of Christ across the community such as patterns of racial segregation and disinvestment in impoverished neighborhoods which will then urge believers to collaborate in contesting injustice.<sup>47</sup>

M. Shawn Copeland also highlights increased solidarity as an outcome of partaking in the Eucharist. She argues that it is an essential disposition for defying white supremacy and its effects both in society and in the Christian community. But, she contends, it must go beyond simply cultivating awareness of and pity for the marginalized. Indeed, Copeland asserts that it involves “personal encounter, responsible intellectual preparation, and healing and creative action for change in society” to “shoulder suffering and oppression” alongside “exploited and despised black bodies.” She also crucially states it “involves critique of self, of society, of church.”<sup>48</sup> However, the Christian practice of solidarity is not only enacted individually but also collectively as Christ’s Body. Copeland underscores how the Body is sustained and nourished by the Eucharist. The sacrament inculcates a particular kind of solidarity, which she describes as “something much deeper and far more extensive than consuming elements of the ritual meal” because it ideally orients those who receive it toward meeting “the social consequences of the Eucharist.”<sup>49</sup>

Among these consequences, Copeland contends that “Eucharistic solidarity opposes all intentionally divisive segregation of bodies.”<sup>50</sup> Due to the formative influence rituals have on people’s imaginations, values, and capacity to embody Christ, she notes that Christians must be attentive to whether Eucharistic celebrations stimulate “spatial inclusion, authentic recognition, and humble embrace of different bodies.”<sup>51</sup> Eucharistic solidarity also impels Christians to a more profound dedication to discipleship, instilling a commitment to interrupt and

---

47 Grimes, 234.

48 Copeland, 126.

49 Copeland, 127.

50 Copeland, 127.

51 Copeland, 127.

counter the destructive habits and hurtful messages of white supremacy. It seeks to move those who participate in the Eucharist, and other forms of worship to advocate for justice in the church and the world. Yet, as Copeland rightly cautions, such actions should not be limited only to the groups that individuals belong to, but done on behalf of all people to attain a more thorough transformation of society and bring about the unity and flourishing of the entire body of Christ.<sup>52</sup>

Sister Thea Bowman, F.S.P.A., once observed that “the quest for justice demands that I walk in ways that I never walked before, that I talk and think and pray and learn and grow in ways that are new to me.”<sup>53</sup> Scrutinizing and dismantling the habits of white supremacy will require predominantly white congregations to try new ways of thinking, praying, and interacting with the diverse and global church. By responding to racial oppression with new approaches that contest the misuse of sacraments and disrupt the power of denial in worship, Christians will foster a more authentic, inclusive, and flourishing Body of Christ.



---

52 Copeland, 128.

53 Thea Bowman, F.S.P.A., “Justice, Power, and Praise” in *Liturgy and Social Justice: Celebrating Rites—Proclaiming Rights*, ed. Edward M. Grosz (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1989), 37.

---

## Bibliography

Bowman, E.S.P.A., Thea. "Justice, Power, and Praise." In *Liturgy and Social Justice: Celebrating Rites—Proclaiming Rights*, edited by Edward M. Grosz, 26-39. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1989.

Chauvet, Louis-Marie. *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body*. Translated by Madeleine Beaumont. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001.

Clifford, SJ, Richard J. *Psalms 1-72*. Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2002.

Copeland, M. Shawn. *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010.

Francis, CSV, Mark R. *Shape a Circle Ever Wider: Liturgical Inculturation in the United States*. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2000.

Hawn, C. Michael. "Reverse Missions: Global Singing for Local Congregations," in *Music in Christian Worship*, edited by Charlotte Kroeker, 98-111. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005.

Second Vatican Council, "Sacrosanctum Concilium: Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy," in *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents*, edited Austin Flannery, O.P., 117-161. Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1996.

Tessman, Lisa. *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

*United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship*. Washington, D.C.: USCCB Publishing, 2007.

West, Traci C. *Disruptive Christian Ethics: When Racism and Women's Lives Matter*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.