

Is There Such a Thing as Online Eucharist?

Understanding the Eucharistic Presence
of Christ

1.0 The Dichotomization of Spiritual and Physical

- 1.1 The biblical concept of “spiritual”
 - Spiritual: “pertaining to the Spirit of God.”

1.0 The Dichotomization of Spiritual and Physical

- 1.2 Pitting charisma against institution
 - If the church is both an institution and a charismatic body, then to focus only on the “spiritual” at the expense of the institutional is a gross distortion of the meaning of the church.

1.0 The Dichotomization of Spiritual and Physical

- 1.3 Word without sacrament
 - When word-without-sacrament becomes the norm, it is one small step towards making online service or the digital church the norm.

1.0 The Dichotomization of Spiritual and Physical

- 1.4 The consequence of splitting spiritual and physical
 - If feelings about God define *my* faith, then we are playing the same “language game” as those who believe that feelings about who they are define their identities.

Summary

The Spirit, far from turning Christian fellowship into some disembodied engagement, brings us into physical communion.

2.0 The Doctrine of the Church

- 2.1 Introduction

- Normalization of online worship reflects a defective view of the church.

- 2.2. The Church: Two Affirmations

2.21 The church is both an institution and a spiritual fellowship.

2.22 The church is distinguished from all other bodies by word and sacrament.

Church distinguished by word and sacrament

- Calvin's definition of church:
 - "Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists."

2.21 The church as institution and spiritual fellowship

- 2.211 The church is instituted by Christ and
- 2.212 Constituted by the Spirit (Zizioulas).

2.211 Church, Instituted by Christ: Four Acts

- First Act: The Call of the Twelve
- Second Act: The Last Supper
 - Through this covenantal act of eating and drinking, Jesus created a new spiritual family

Third Act: The Post-Resurrection Gift of the Spirit

- 19 On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” 20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”

Third Act: The Post-Resurrection Gift of the Spirit

- 22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld” (John 20: 19-23).
 - He gives them the authority of church discipline (cf. Matt 16:19)

Fourth Act: The Great Commission

- 18 And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt 28: 18-20).

Fourth Act: The Great Commission

- The great commission ensures the perpetuation of the church as God's institution
- Disciple-making includes baptism: incorporation into the church

2.211 Summary

The church as institution is like the Greek *polis*.
A *polis* is a concrete community bound together
by a polity.

2.212 Church as constituted by the Spirit

- In the very act of gathering to celebrate word and sacrament, the people are no longer a collectivity of individuals but are constituted by the Spirit as members of the body of Christ sharing the one bread and one cup.

3.0 The Eucharistic Presence

- The eucharistic presence is a special mode of Christ's presence where believers are transformed into the one body of Christ through the action of the Holy Spirit.

3.0 The Eucharistic Presence

- 3.1 Modes of Christ's presence
 - First mode: The physical presence of Christ
 - Second mode: Spiritual presence
 - Third mode: EUCHARISTIC PRESENCE
 - Fourth mode: Face-to-face presence

3.2 Eucharistic Presence in Calvin

- Through the action of the Holy Spirit, we receive sacramentally the body and blood of Christ in the form of bread and wine.
- This special partaking of Christ in bread and wine is to be distinguished from a more general partaking “of the Holy Spirit only.”

3.3 Nature of the eucharistic presence

- For Christ to be eucharistically present, two conditions must be met:
 - There must be a gathering of the people of God (the *qahal* or *ecclesia*) in Jesus' name *in a locality*.
 - The gathering must be to celebrate word *and* sacrament.

3.4 Eucharistic presence different from spiritual presence

- 3.41 Paul's concept of "present in spirit"
- 3.42 The epiclesis in the eucharistic prayer

3.41 Eucharistic Presence and Paul's "present in spirit/the Spirit" (1 Cor 5:1-5)

- Vv. 4 and 5a: "So when you are assembled and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, 5 hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh..."
- Gordon Fee: It is characteristic of Pauline pneumatology to regard actions arising from the depths of the human spirit *as also* the action of the divine Spirit who indwells believers, just as praying in spirit is at once our praying and the Spirit praying in us (cf. 1 Cor 14: 14-15; Rom 8: 15-16, 26).

3.41 Eucharistic Presence and Paul's "present in spirit/the Spirit" (1 Cor 5:1-5)

- In the context of the assembly, the reading of his letter serves as "the tangible way in which the Spirit communicates his prophetic-apostolic ministry in their midst."
- One can hear the word without full physical presence, but one cannot properly speak of fellowship around the Lord's Table without the physical gathering. This fundamental difference is what distinguishes "spiritual presence" (the second mode of Christ's presence) from eucharistic presence (the third mode).

3.42 The epiclesis in the eucharistic prayer

- The words of institution
- The epiclesis

Explicit *epiclesis* in song

Here at Your Table, Lord,
Through Your feast we draw near,
Pour out Your Spirit now,
To know Your presence dear;
From this dark world, our eyes lift up,
As we drink from redemption's cup
—D. P. Williams

Implicit epiclesis

- P.C. Nelson, *Bible Doctrines* (1948):
 - “If you are sick and afflicted in your body and can discern the healing virtue in the body of the Lord, typified by the bread, you may receive healing and strength for your body as well as for your spiritual nature (1 Cor. 11:30-32).”

Summary: Nature of the eucharistic presence

- The eucharistic presence is not his presence in all believers everywhere through the Spirit but specifically the Spirit's "localized" presence in the gathering of God's people to hear the word and partake of the sacrament.

3.5 The Eucharist and the catholicity of the liturgical assembly

- The local church possesses the quality of wholeness
- Catholic (*kath'holos*): “according to the whole”
 - Catholicity is a quality that belongs to the local church as much as to the church universal.
 - Transcending racial, social, and gender distinctions
 - The Eucharist is the epiphany of the local church’s catholicity, for it is in the local gathering that the wholeness of the church is most palpably revealed.

3.5 The Eucharist and the catholicity of the local church

- The church catholic is, first and foremost, the eucharistic gathering within a locality where all believers share the bread and cup at the Lord's Table and so become the one body of Christ.

4.0 Summary and conclusion

- To deal with the problem of dichotomization, I propose a “thick” ecclesiology where church is defined as both institution and spiritual fellowship and as word and sacrament.
- If the eucharistic presence is a distinctive mode of Christ’s presence in the liturgical assembly, then there is no place for online eucharist under any circumstance.
- Online worship should not become the norm.

Summary

If the ecclesia is the people of God called out from the world to become an alternative *polis*, the liturgical assembly is the people of God called out from their homes to celebrate word and sacrament.

4.0 Summary and conclusion

- In the present age, koinonia in Christ is *primarily* fellowship around the Lord's Table in the gathering of the local assembly.
- Any fellowship that is less than fully embodied is not fully spiritual either.

Eucharistic Presence and the Marriage Supper

- Eucharistic communion is *not yet* the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (the fourth mode of Christ's presence), nor is it synonymous with spiritual presence (the second mode); rather, it is the presence of Christ mediated by the Spirit in which believers in the interim are nourished by Christ's body and blood to become the body of Christ in the local assembly.