



John D. Zizioulas

THE EUCHARISTIC COMMUNION AND THE WORLD

EDITED BY LUKE BEN TALLON

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INTRODUCTION

John Zizioulas presents a beautiful theological vision. That is what initially attracted me to his theology and what has kept me coming back again and again. At one level this collection serves simply to allow more readers to encounter more of this theological vision. Zizioulas's theology has certainly attracted the attention of many theologians over the past generation and the breadth and depth of his theological influence is even more remarkable when one considers that it is due principally to *one* collection of essays, published in English in 1985: *Being as Communion*. Not surprisingly, this dense and difficult work has been interpreted in a variety of ways by both admirers and detractors from across the ecumenical spectrum, with Zizioulas emerging variously as a true teacher of the orthodox Church, an existentialist in theologian's garb, or a despiser of the material world. Given the small sample of work upon which many of these judgements depend and their often mutually contradictory character, the recent publications of Zizioulas's *Communion & Otherness* (2006) and *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics* (2008) were welcome events (with special thanks due to the editorial work of Paul McPartlan and Douglas Knight, respectively). The latter work, in particular, shows the overall shape and content of Zizioulas's theology with lucidity and brevity.

The present collection of essays aims to reveal a further dimension of depth in Zizioulas's theological vision by bringing together writings that deal specifically with the Eucharist and its relation to the world. Interpreters of Zizioulas often note that the Eucharist is the heart, basis and goal of his theology, but less often do they provide a description of the concrete Eucharist that Zizioulas assumes as the context for his more well-known teaching regarding personhood, communion and otherness. The following essays provide this context as Zizioulas approaches the Eucharist from several different angles. In accomplishing this positive task, I hope that this collection will also accomplish the

negative task of demonstrating the problems involved in a few of the common interpretations of Zizioulas — interpretations shown to be rather implausible in light of the understanding of the Eucharist and its relation to the world evident in the following essays. For instance, the many discussions in these essays of a) the place of creation in the concrete celebrations of the Eucharist and b) the Church's affirmation of the material world in the Eucharist militate against reading Zizioulas as denigrating creation. Likewise, the discussions of the Eucharist as an *active* communion that forms an *ethos* in its participants that has radical implications for daily life make problematic (to say the least) interpretations of Zizioulas as unconcerned with human action.

Most important, however, is the opportunity to see how Zizioulas goes about the work of theology and the form and content of his 'eucharistic' (and therefore 'worldly') theology. Several aspects of this work merit special comment.

Zizioulas's engagement with scripture. Although scripture certainly is woven into Zizioulas's other work, these essays (particularly the first chapter) manifest a deeper engagement and more patient exposition. Unsurprisingly, Zizioulas reads scripture canonically, allowing the canon to form the context for interpretation. Historical critics would no doubt be disappointed, but Zizioulas's eucharistic-liturgical hermeneutic and attention to the Christological-ecclesial *scope* of the canon opens up some fruitful juxtapositions of the Johannine and Pauline texts. Particularly interesting, if rather undeveloped, are the implications that Zizioulas's navigation of the difference-in-continuity between the historical events and the Church's *remembrance* might have for biblical interpretation beyond the accounts of the Last Supper. Even more interesting (and unremarked) are the implications of Zizioulas's account of *eschatological causality* for the study of scripture (and church history), given that such study generally assumes *protological causality*.

The relationship between ecclesiology and Christology. Nearly every argument in this collection depends in some way upon Zizioulas's understanding of Christ as the *totus Christus* — Christ as the 'one' who unites the 'many', Christ the head *with* his ecclesial body. The argumentation is not laid out as it is in *Being as Communion* and *Communion & Otherness*, but here we see more of the practical implications of this recurring motif. The *totus Christus* provides the theological muscle for Zizioulas's claim that the local Church of a particular place gathered together to celebrate the Eucharist *is* the catholic Church, for the presence of Christ in a eucharistic gathering means the presence of the *whole* Christ. This is to say that Zizioulas's *catholic* Christology is a *pneumatological* Christology. Just as Jesus Christ only *is* by the Holy Spirit and is inconceivable apart from the Spirit, so too Jesus Christ,

the 'one', cannot be separated from the 'many' he incorporates in the Spirit. As the *totus Christus*, Jesus Christ is *the sacrament*. This person is the *mystery* of God's reconciliation of the world to himself, the *way* the 'many' become 'one' while remaining themselves. The other 'sacraments' are not objective signs or channels of God's grace, each distinct from the other, but ways in which the Holy Spirit realizes the eschatological and catholic Christ in history and therefore *every* 'sacrament' depends upon the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Eschatological memory and eschatological being. An *eschatological* account of the eucharistic 'remembrance' stands at the heart of Zizioulas' doctrine of the Eucharist. First, Zizioulas argues that it is crucial to recognize that this remembrance is *personal*. Jesus did not ask his followers to remember merely 'my words' or 'my actions' but to remember 'me'. Second, the resurrection means that the Church's remembrance of Christ will be different from other remembering. Other remembrance is oriented to the past, who someone *was*. In the Eucharist, however, the Church remembers the risen one who *is to come*. As this coming one, Jesus Christ, is the recapitulation of creation, his significance for the rest of creation is *ontological*. Creation does not exist in and of itself; it came from nothing and would return from nothing apart from the grace of God. Yet, in Jesus Christ we see the future of creation, for in him God's will to share his life with creation is revealed and *realized*. As creation ultimately will receive her being from Jesus Christ, who comes to us from the *eschaton* (as *ho eschatos*), our very being is eschatological. This leads Zizioulas to develop an *eschatological* account of created *being*. Things *are* not by virtue of what they were but by virtue of what they will be in the age to come. The *future*, not the *past*, causes things to be. This emphasis on the *personal* and *ontological* are much needed, given the temptation of merely *psychological* remembrance.

Liturgy as icon: symbol of the eschaton. Zizioulas argues that the eucharistic liturgy is an *icon* of the Kingdom, which is to claim that it bears the image of the eschatological Kingdom of God through participation in it. The persons, things and act of the Eucharist are symbolic, bridges between the uncreated and created. Unlike other religious symbols, however, the eucharistic symbols *participate* in the unique union of created and uncreated in the *person* of Jesus Christ — an historical event that occurred in freedom and did not depend upon any correspondence between the divine and human natures. In other words, liturgical symbols are *icons* that 1) depend only upon the free decision of God (freedom as love) and not any correspondence between created and uncreated; 2) are drawn from events in *history* and cannot be based on *natural* properties; and 3) have their source in the eschatological event of the Kingdom of God. Thus, the water of baptism is not a symbol of the

cleansing power of water, but of Israel's exodus from Egypt through the sea, even as the exodus is a type of baptism and not *vice versa*. In this way liturgical symbols are iconic: dependent upon the historical event of the hypostatic union even as they remain distinct from it; Christ is present *personally* (not *naturally*) through them. This would seem to have implications for our understanding of the presence of Christ in the bread and wine of the Eucharist, but Zizioulas leaves them undeveloped. As persons, too, may serve as liturgical symbols, Zizioulas also views the eucharistic *orders* as iconic symbols that image the structure of the eschatological Kingdom (indeed, the discussion of *persons* in chapter three provides the context for Zizioulas' more well-known discussions of personhood as an *ontological* category). Ultimately, the Eucharist as a whole is an image of the eschatological Kingdom of God and can only be understood as such.

The Eucharist as prayer for the Holy Spirit. As the Church receives its being *eschatologically*, its true character is revealed in the eucharistic *epiclesis*, the prayer over the bread and wine for the sending of the Holy Spirit. Just as the *person* of Christ cannot be divorced from his *work* in space and time, the taste of the *eschaton* given in the Eucharist cannot be isolated from either the fruits of *creation* (the bread and the wine) or the *history* the people of God. Yet, the Eucharist is a foretaste of the life of God only through the work of the Spirit, not because the created elements or the history of the Church objectively guarantee the inbreaking of the *eschaton*. As the community does not possess the means to make Christ present in the Eucharist, it can only pray for the Spirit to bring this transformation about and look for it in hope (that is, *epictetically*). For this reason, the foretaste of the *eschaton* given in the Eucharist does not lessen the Church's hunger for the *parousia* of Christ, but actually *intensifies* it. Far from leading to triumphalism, the Eucharist *intensifies* the Church's struggle with the evil and death present in the world. This renders impossible any armistice between the Church and death, any ontological linkage of being and death (as in some strands of existentialism). The presence of the eschatological Kingdom in the midst of the eucharistic gathering, however, reveals that the Church cannot oppose death by fleeing space and time, materiality and history; for in the Eucharist, the life of the world to come meets the Church in space and time, indicating that it must be transformed, not abandoned.

The Holy Spirit. As indicated in the previous comments, the Holy Spirit appears (or is assumed) at nearly every critical juncture in this book. Christ accomplished the reconciliation of God and the world in the Holy Spirit, and now lives in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit makes Christ the *catholic* Christ, in whom the 'many' become 'one'

without losing their particularity. The *eschaton* enters history by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit ‘reminds’ us of Christ and thereby transforms our eucharistic ‘remembrance’ into *eschatological* remembrance. At its heart, the Eucharist is the *koinonia* of the Holy Spirit — a mystery of love, as Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 13. This last observation leads Zizioulas to a eucharistic understanding of spiritual gifts: while they are by no means limited to the eucharistic *synaxis*, they do find their *telos* there. The Church, then, cannot operate with an *ordination-charism* binary. On one hand this means that ordination is a *gift* of the Spirit and cannot be understood as a sacrament in itself (an objective possession, with the accompanying dilemma as to whether it is ontological or merely functional). Rather, it must be understood as an epicletic prayer that cannot be isolated from the personal relations of the local community and the presence and activity of the living Christ therein. On the other hand this means that there are no *private* gifts, no work of the Spirit that does not have as its ultimate end the Church’s eucharistic participation in Jesus Christ, the *eschatological* and *catholic* Adam.

Christ, Spirit, Eschaton and Order. The preceding comments indicate the importance of the *structure* or *order* of the Eucharist in Zizioulas’s theology and his *theological* justification for it. This reflects Zizioulas’s belief that ecclesiality is not merely a matter of piety, ethics or historical institution, but of *rightly ordered relationships*, or *ordinations*. The reality of the Eucharist and the Church that gathers to celebrate it depends upon the assembly of all four orders: the local ‘people’, or *laos*, in all its diversity, as well as the presence of the deacons, presbyters and bishop. The bishop stands in the place of God and images Christ, gathering the many gifts of the Church, offering them to God as one and receiving them back as one before distributing them to the many. The college of presbyters gathered around the bishop to discern the body of Christ image the twelve thrones around the throne of God and the eschatological judgement of all creation. The deacons’ gathering of the gifts of creation and distribution of the gifts of God images the eschatological ministry of humanity as the priests of creation. In these orders we see how *differences* are preserved even as any divisions between the ‘one’ and the ‘many’ are abolished.

The concern for the practical and concrete. These essays are provocatively concrete and practical, demonstrating that Zizioulas’s teaching on persons, communion and otherness has radical implications for the life of the Church and its relationship to the world. It may be that some readers will prefer the abstract thinker they imagined Zizioulas to be over Zizioulas as we encounter him here. For instance, the centrality Zizioulas assigns to the structure of the Eucharist is one of the more

difficult aspects of his thought. At this point a great deal of freight rides upon his contested reconstruction of the biblical and early Christian testimonies to the structure of the Eucharist. Moreover, Zizioulas does not specify just how far the structure of a Eucharist can deviate from his formal standard before it is compromised. Zizioulas allows, however, for an imperfect coincidence of theory and practice and thus for the possibility that a Church that does not accept the theory of episcopal office or ordination in historical apostolic succession may in fact outstrip an episcopal Church claiming apostolic succession in its practice. Full communion, Zizioulas judges, will require all Churches to reform their eucharistic practice in some way. Further questions are raised by Zizioulas's emphasis on the necessity of the *whole laos* for the celebration of the Eucharist. If private masses or Eucharists restricted on the basis of age, gender, profession, race, etc. are improper, what of those churches in socio-economically and racially segregated areas of the world (for instance parts of my own United States)? Even if the whole local *laos* were gathered, the Eucharist could still be quite 'restrictive'. All in all, Zizioulas's concern is for the connection between *form* and *content*, *symbol* and *truth*, even if he does not address many of the questions it raises.

The Eucharist and love for the world. Zizioulas discusses love at several points in the following essays with an eye to its eschatological and pneumatological dimensions. Just as the unity of the 'many' in the 'one' in the Eucharist is an eschatological event, so too is the love that Christians are called to show each other and their enemies. This love is not simply a matter of *ethics* — of a different *action*. Rather, it is a matter of *eschatology*, knowing others not as they have been (past sins, etc.), but as they may be in the *eschaton* (a member and neighbour in the Kingdom). In loving each other and their enemies, Christians refuse to live according to the present evil age and live according to the age to come — something possible only by the Holy Spirit. These discussions of love reveal that Zizioulas's hesitancy to speak of the Christian life as an *ethic* by no means stems from a desire to deny the *active* character of the Christian life. Rather, Zizioulas strives against the moralism that so pervades Christianity — the tendency to turn this dynamic life in communion into a list of 'do's and 'do not's. The Eucharist entails new actions, but they are meaningless apart from the new *mode of being* we receive in it: an *ethos*, or way of life, that heals our distorted relations, moving us towards our life in the Kingdom of God.

The Eucharist and judgement of the world. As a foretaste of the *eschaton*, the Eucharist also involves a foretaste of the eschatological judgement of the world. The eucharistic gifts and the members of the eucharistic community are *holy*, and this involves an element of opposition to

the world, even if it is ultimately in service to the world. At one level this opposition means that the Church and her members are on trial during the Eucharist: members must be reconciled one to another and if a member persists in offending the body, he or she must be shut out in the pastoral hope that this will result in renewed *metanoia*, and thereby renewed *koinonia*. It is instructive that Zizioulas understands the problem of intercommunion as a post-baptismal, pre-Eucharist rupture and recommends that the churches treat them as such. At another level, this Church-world opposition means that the world stands trial during the Eucharist. This is seen most clearly in the character of the Eucharist as a communion of the baptized: those who have accepted the judgement rendered when they were confronted with the Word of God and turned towards God (*metanoia*) in the death, burial and resurrection of baptism. Although the Church is set apart from the world and judges the world in a certain sense, it is ultimately *for* the world. Its relationship to the world flows from the fact that Christ recapitulated *all creation* and not only the Church. In partaking in Christ through the Eucharist, the Church receives a foretaste of not only forgiveness of sins, but also of the *new creation* in Christ. Therefore the Church lifts up creation in the *anaphora* in hope of *the whole world's* rebirth in baptism.

The human as the priest of creation. The Eucharist provides an eschatological vision of the world as a cosmic liturgy in which humans act as the priests of creation, lifting up creation to God and receiving it back, blessed with God's own life. Apart from this blessing, finite creation will perish. This is to say that apart from the gift of God, creation will return to the nothingness from which God called it forth. Humanity was created to be the mediator of this life. Humans, however, rejected this priestly vocation and idolatrously attempted to make themselves into God, condemning the cosmos to return to nothingness. The incarnation reveals God's utter unwillingness to abandon creation to this fate. Through the incarnation, Jesus Christ recapitulated creation by fulfilling humanity's priestly vocation. The eucharistic vision reveals that the priestly transformation of the world does not involve its destruction or abandonment, in whole or in part. All aspects of the Church's life are oriented to participating in Christ's priesthood: from the baptismal death that ends the human claim to be gods to the celebration of the Eucharist in which the Church offers the created world to God and then distributes the life of God to creation. This understanding of humanity and our priestly vocation has several implications for ecology: 1) the current crisis concerns our very being and not just human well-being; 2) our approach cannot be simply *negative* (the cessation of destruction) or *moralistic*, for the situation calls for the *creation* of an ecological-liturgical *culture*; 3) this culture will involve the

transformation of nature, not in order to fuel human idolatry, but so that it might survive into the age to come.

In closing this introduction, I would like to thank Elizabeth Theokritoff, who has translated so much of Zizioulas's work from Greek, and Alan Torrance, my PhD advisor and Zizioulas's erstwhile colleague, who enthusiastically endorsed my decision to give Zizioulas's theology serious study, challenged me to go my own way in interpreting Zizioulas, and in fact encouraged me to undertake this present project.

CHAPTER ONE

BIBLICAL ASPECTS OF THE EUCHARIST

Preliminary Remarks

The testimony of the New Testament concerning the Eucharist is both extremely limited and, by its nature, difficult to interpret. It is limited because the only explicit accounts of the Lord's Supper which have reached us are found in a few verses of the Gospels (Mk. 14: 17-26; Mt. 26:20-30; Lk. 22:14-23) and the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians (11:23-26). We have even less information regarding the form that the celebration of the Eucharist took in the apostolic Church. This lack of information is surprising. Indeed, it is difficult to explain the paucity of sources unless we attribute it to the Church's desire to protect the secret discipline from non-Christian eyes,¹ or to the natural tendency not to define or discuss that which constitutes the core of our life.² In both cases, the relative silence of the New Testament reveals the close relationship between the Eucharist and the mystery of the Church, making it rather difficult to interpret this testimony.

In fact, everything the New Testament tells us about the Eucharist is inseparably linked to the Church's experience of this act, so it becomes very difficult to understand the Eucharist strictly in its primitive phase, because the Eucharist was instituted in order to be repeated ('Do this in remembrance of me'), and by the very obeying of this command the Church has become a living reality that we must understand in one way or another. Our understanding of the first act is not identical with the act itself. This difference exists because (and this is important) the original act occurred *before* the death and resurrection of Christ, but it was reported in the New Testament *after* these events had informed the conscience of the Church. Thus, the apostolic Church's interpretation of the act of Christ is so deeply connected to the act itself in the New Testament accounts that any attempt to study these two

1 For a discussion of this issue, see J.J. von Allmen, *The Lord's Supper*, 2002, p. 17ff.

2 It should be noted that in the early centuries of the Church there was no definition of the Eucharist, or even of the Church itself.

aspects separately (original act and its ecclesial interpretation) would create immediately problems as intractable as those created by the distinction between the ‘historical Jesus’ and the ‘Christ of faith’ in the Gospels.

Therefore we will not allow ourselves to be detained by the problematics raised by some modern schools of New Testament exegesis based on assumptions different or even opposite to the one just mentioned. In the following section, we intend to go back to the first Eucharist — as the apostolic Church presents it to us in the New Testament — and to search for the meaning it had for the Church of that time.

I. The Eucharist: Eschatological Meal in the History of the People of God

1. The Passover Meal and the Last Supper

We are able to make a preliminary remark on the Eucharist as the New Testament presents it to us: this *meal* is situated in the context of *the history of the people of Israel*. Exegetes do not all agree that the Last Supper was indeed a Jewish Passover,³ but there is no doubt that it took place in the context of the Easter celebration.

The descriptions of this meal in the four major accounts of the New Testament (cited above), although different in several respects, nevertheless offer a basic sketch:

- The meal took place at night (in all accounts of the Last Supper);
- Our Lord took the cup, blessed it (or ‘gave thanks’) and gave it to his disciples (only in Luke);
- He ‘dipped a piece’ with the disciple who would betray him (in Mark, Matthew and John);
- He took bread and gave thanks (in all accounts);
- He broke the bread and distributed it to the disciples, explaining the significance of the bread (all accounts);
- At the end of the meal, he took the cup and gave thanks (in all accounts — though only certain manuscripts of Luke);
- He circulated the cup, explaining what it meant (in all accounts — though only certain manuscripts of Luke);
- After singing the final song, he and his disciples went out to the Mount of Olives (Mark, Matthew, Luke).

3 For an argument that the Last Supper is not a paschal meal, see D.E. Nineham, *Saint Mark*, 1963, pp. 455–458; for an argument that the Last Supper is a paschal meal, see J. Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, 1955.

All these elements are obviously part of the ritual Passover meal, which means that we cannot understand the original structure of the Eucharist if we do not recognize its essential role in salvation history — its role in the history of God's chosen people, Israel. However, this structure also has several elements that make the Last Supper a meal which, by its *eschatological nature*, transcends history. Let us study some of these elements.

First, and negatively, we should note that the New Testament ignores several elements of the Passover meal, even elements integral to the structure of the Passover meal. For example, there is no description of the main meal with the paschal lamb, or references to the four cups that the householder was to be circulating during the course of this meal. We could explain these omissions by saying that the New Testament writers did not intend to give a full account of the Last Supper, but it is precisely this willingness to *make a choice* among the various elements of the meal that is so significant. This choice cannot have been merely random, for one finds the same basic account throughout the New Testament, despite the differences on other points. How, then, could we safely claim that the Church *chose* from the original structure of the meal (at an unknown date and in an unknown way) the elements reported by the New Testament? Or would it be better to claim that the Last Supper, as celebrated by the Lord, took place according to a pattern that did not include *certain* elements of the Passover meal? If we take seriously the fact that the apostolic Church considered that the structure of the Last Supper, as described in the New Testament accounts, was (in the words of Saint Paul) a direct transmission from the Lord to the Church, the second hypothesis is much more appealing. Whatever our decision, this choice remains significant, even in its negative sense, because it indicates the importance of the history of Israel for the formation of the Eucharist, even while indicating at the same time that its formation *relativizes* this history.

This all takes a positive meaning if one considers not only the omissions, but the real differences between the Passover meal and the Last Supper described in the New Testament. There are differences both with regard to the participants and with regard to the general interpretation of the Last Supper. We shall first examine the participants.

In the description of the Last Supper, there is, I believe, an important element that is usually neglected: while the Passover meal is a *family* event, the Last Supper is an event that concerns a *group of friends* with Christ presiding. This difference indicates that with the Last Supper we move away from a sort of natural community in order to move to another kind of community — formed by a *group of friends* who love their master and love each other (to use the idea so strong in and so