

## Article

# Resolution and Remote Real Presence: How Does Preaching Relate to the Eucharist in Remote Worship?

Timothy Andrew Leitzke <sup>1,2</sup><sup>1</sup> Trinity Lutheran Church, Valparaiso, IN 46383, USA; taleitzke@gmail.com<sup>2</sup> Department of Theology, Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, IN 46383, USA

**Abstract:** Liturgical renewal has emphasized the partnership of preaching and Eucharist. What does this partnership look like in the new reality of remote preaching and worship? The church has largely ignored this partnership in conversations about remote worship. Official statements treat preaching as necessary while discouraging or forbidding remote celebrations of the Eucharist. The work of pre-pandemic theologians to foster this partnership suggests that not only is remote Eucharist possible, but it is preferable to holding remote worship without Eucharist. This article makes that claim, emphasizing preaching and Eucharist as two pieces of a single liturgical action. In doing so, it breaks with theologians who emphasized the partnership between preaching and Eucharist before the pandemic but have opposed remote Eucharist once it was being practiced widely.

**Keywords:** digital worship; digital eucharist; digital preaching; remote worship; remote eucharist; remote preaching; Jean-Luc Marion; phenomenology; sacramental theology



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## 1. Liturgical Partnership

Preaching and Eucharist are partners. Decades of liturgical renewal have pressed this claim. A key reform of Vatican II is that *Sacrosanctum Concilium* explicitly requires a homily at Mass (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 1963, 35.2, 52). From the protestant side, the push has been for more frequent celebration of Holy Communion. The movement has been toward the position of Martin Luther. As summarized by Theodore Bachmann, the sacraments “are not substitutes for the Word, instead they substantiate the Word and the intention of God”, and “the sacrament is therefore not simply subordinate to the Word but it takes its place visibly on the same level as the preached Word . . . . The communion available in the Lord’s Supper is given nowhere else in this same vivified way” (Bachmann 1960, pp. xiii and xvi).

I write from the perspective of a preacher who counts on Eucharist. I experience Bachmann’s assertion that Eucharist offers a “vivified” communion. To put it in terms of the title metaphor, proclamation without its partner, Eucharist, is waiting to resolve. The metaphor is musical, and I apologize to those who do not hear. In Western music, there are chords that, to the ear, sound inconclusive. The listener does not have to know any music theory; they can tell that this chord is not the end of a song. Another chord will follow and will “resolve” the tension. This resolution need not be tidy; a piece might intentionally end in dissonance. The listener still knows that this is the ending, where the previous chord was not. Preaching and Eucharist are, in this example, two chords together in the same piece of music. With just the chord of preaching, the piece is incomplete. With just the resolution, there was nothing to resolve and the listener wonders if the performer missed something.

I count on the Eucharist in no small part because of the richness of symbol involved. I use the word symbol in the sense of multiple meanings “thrown together” and not in the colloquial sense of “mere symbolism”. The prayer uttered at the table during Eucharist calls to mind a God acting through (and even before) history, the dominical institution of the meal on the night of Christ’s arrest, memory of crucifixion, eschatological hope, God making all things holy including the grave—and that is not even getting to the contemporary humans

who planted, harvested, baked, and fermented the food and drink on the table. I assume this complex of meanings when I use the word “Eucharist”.

Remote worship poses challenges to this way of thinking. One might meditate on the mystery of God not only being in words but in words transmitted via radio, satellite, internet, etc. This is still a matter of words and not objects. What of the mystery of Christ’s bodily presence? What of the mystery of a physical union with the saints of every time and place? What of the mystery of the Spirit present in something or someone not myself? What of the mystery of a meal shared in remembrance of Christ and anticipation of the reign of God (*Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry* 1982, pp. 10–15)? What of the fact that these are beyond words, and that their being beyond words helps anchor proclamation both in the mundane world of food and drink and the absolutely alien world of a god beyond our comprehension? Alternatively, in terms of my title: am I left only to offer an unresolved chord when preaching remotely?

I believe the answer is no. I believe Eucharist in remote worship is not only possible but preferable. Remote Eucharist grounds remote proclamation at each location in which it is celebrated. Remote preaching calls out for remote Eucharist to embody the grace spoken in preaching. In what follows I will describe two pre-pandemic approaches to eucharistic and homiletic partnership—one developed from the work of Jean-Luc Marion, the other from liturgical theologian Melinda Quivik. Then, I will show how this partnership has been ignored in conversations about remote worship since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the course of this section, I will cover how churches have officially barred remote holy communion. Finally, with help from a 16th century theologian (Martin Luther) and a 21st century theologian (Jean-Luc Marion), I will show how remote eucharistic celebration and remote preaching as partners provide a way around the remote Eucharist impasse.

### 1.1. *Sacrament and Word (Before COVID)*

In *Serving the Word*, Melinda Quivik asks us to ask the question: could Scripture’s eucharistic narrative be telling us that we need more than words? Quivik opens with a modest claim that “Proclamation of the Word in the sermon serves the whole of worship, just as the worship serves the preaching” (Quivik 2009, p. 2). This claim rests on another, that “[t]he assembly does not grasp the meaning of God’s word simply by cognitive means but by living within many modes of expression: verbal and nonverbal, spoken and silent, still and moving, through symbols presented and even through their absence” (Quivik 2009, p. 3).

Quivik anchors her proposal in the Emmaus Road story in Luke 24. She makes an important—perhaps so obvious it is ignored—claim that Jesus interpreted scriptures as referring to himself. In Luke 24, Jesus “opens up the scriptures so that their interpretation brings light into darkness, hope into despair. This is preaching” (Quivik 2009, p. 60). In other words, the first Christian sermon was preached by the risen Jesus Christ and consisted of his explanation that scripture refers to him, and this is a cause for hope. Quivik links the eucharistic meal closely with preaching. She asserts that we do not discern Jesus’ identity on our own, but only in Jesus’ interpretation which culminates in the giving of his body; that the eucharistic meal makes “visible the otherwise invisible, audible Word of God”; and that the eucharistic meal visually represents the realm of God which should have been named (as a place of equality and grace) in the preaching (Quivik 2009, pp. 70–73). Quivik does not indicate the *necessity* of preaching alongside Eucharist, but does suggest this is the preferred order of things.

Having opened with a modest claim, Quivik closes with a more radical claim:

“The Emmaus story challenges us to think about the possibility that Scripture is telling us something about how we learn. This story does not say that the disciples understood the events in Jerusalem when the Scriptures were opened for them. No, it was only in the meal that they fully ‘got it.’ . . . The very primal act of gathering around food, intending to feed on what will give us another day of life, tells us something about Jesus, the bread of life”. (Quivik 2009, p. 81)

Eucharist preaches in a way spoken words do not, a way that is resonant with how people learn. Word and Eucharist belong together.

My own work has resonated with Quivik, and at turns gone further than she. Where Quivik draws upon the previous generation's liturgical scholarship, I draw upon a(n evolving) reading of Jean-Luc Marion. Marion suggests the Eucharist (in Roman Catholic practice) is an example of God's "givenness". It is part of Marion's overall project to talk about God within a "phenomenology of givenness".

Briefly stated, a phenomenology of givenness contends that humans first experience a phenomenon as giving itself. Only after this do humans attach the quality of being to a phenomenon (Marion 2002, p. 321). The concept of being might be too much or too little to attach to God. Such a God might function as a "god of the gaps" in our knowledge, or as the foundation of a system of thinking that otherwise has no justification, or even—as Levinas (a holocaust survivor) critiques Heidegger (his teacher turned Nazi)—as the justification for dominating (having more being than) others. The consequences of God-as-Being are not confined to classrooms and lecture halls. According to Levinas' critique, Western philosophy falsely presents Being as the origin, or *arkhe*, of all things. Postcolonial theologian HyeRan Kim-Cragg recounts how appeals to the *arkhe* or official (colonizers') archive functioned to replace indigenous knowledge with knowledge approved by the colonizers. (In Levinas' terms, colonizer knowledge *is* while the knowledge of the colonized *is* [presented as] *not*.) Following the performance studies of Diane Taylor, Kim-Cragg contrasts the *arkhe* or archive with the changing repertoire or *reperio* of the conquered. The repertoire gives lie to the claims of the archive (Kim-Cragg 2016, pp. 79–80). A God who is Being and comes with his official archive is highly problematic. Yet people experience God. Thus, Marion argues, before we experience God as possessing Being, we experience God as giving of God's self.<sup>1</sup>

For my purposes, this comes into play in preaching and the Eucharist. Marion argues that, in the Eucharist, Christ gives himself. This giving is an interpretation. The key text, as with Quivik, is the Emmaus Road story in Luke 24. The disciples do not understand what has happened in the death (and rumored resurrection) of Christ, so Christ gives himself as an interpretation of Scripture, first verbally and then at the table. Likewise in the mass, the homily verbally executes an interpretation, and the meal "accomplishes" the interpretation. Or, expressed phenomenologically, worshippers experience the texts, then experience an interpretation. The first part of the interpretation is verbal—the homily. The second part of the same interpretation involves touching, smelling, tasting—the Eucharist.

Robyn Horner criticizes Marion's phenomenology as incomplete: "What we have, in fact, is a phenomenology that has recognized shortcomings and must be explicitly supplemented by hermeneutics" (Horner 2002, p. xiii). Christina Gschwandtner critiques Marion's approach as individualistic and dependent upon the worshipper having the "proper" experience of Eucharist, an experience which Marion's approach cannot guarantee. Gschwandtner argues that the worshipping community plays a role in confirming each participant's hermeneutic. Furthermore, Marion places an unrealistic emphasis on the surprising nature of the Eucharistic phenomenon. Gschwandtner rightly notes that the Eucharist "is deeply grounded in the larger liturgical context in which it occurs", such that it cannot really come as a surprise (Gschwandtner 2014, p. 190). I agree with both critiques, and in *my* use of Marion, I assume a great deal of liturgical situatedness that he seems to pass over, and I read him *for* the hermeneutic he describes.

Marion provides a compelling example of Eucharist as givenness. More to my purposes, he binds Eucharist to preaching—the phenomenon to its indispensable hermeneutic. Preaching and the Meal are two parts of the same act, incomplete without each other.<sup>2</sup>

The chief objection to such a claim is that preaching happens in the absence of the Eucharist all the time. However, this then leads us back to Quivik's observation that the act of gathering around food tells us something about Jesus, something we could not say only with words. The homily and the Eucharist together proclaim what they cannot proclaim separately. Thus, the Presbyterian Church USA states in the *Book of Order*: "The Lord's

Supper enacts and seals what the Word proclaims" (*Book of Order* 2019, W.3.0409). Similarly, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* recognizes the homily as a necessary part of the Mass (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 1963, p. 52)—an instruction for the faithful as they participate in the Eucharist (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 1963, p. 48).

### 1.2. Enter the Pandemic

In mid-March of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic began driving worshipping communities in the United States to worship exclusively online. Platforms varied, decisions were made on the fly, but even people such as myself—who had previously rejected online worship as invalid—were forced to admit that worship online was possible. Was remote worship “better than nothing”? Over the fourteen months that remote worship was the only available format for my parish, I came to the conclusion that remote worship was worship. Period. I cannot qualify it beyond saying that my personal preference is to gather in person, *and* that remote worship opened possibilities that are not available in person.

One point of contention in remote worship was the validity of Eucharist celebrated online. The relationship between Eucharist and preaching did not factor into debates about online Eucharist. On matters of digital worship, it was largely assumed that preaching was preaching, even if listened to remotely. Rather than discuss preaching in relation to Eucharist, the church approached Eucharist in terms of two categories, which I will call “transmissibility of grace” and “the validity of community”.

By “transmissibility of grace”, I mean whether the divine benefits of a rite can be carried over distance. In discussions of online worship, it is widely assumed that God can speak to a listener through a sermon that was recorded or telecast live. It might not be the same as being in the room with the preacher, but God’s grace is transmitted whether present in person or not. Some might object that the term “transmissibility” itself suggests the preacher possesses some kind of magic. That is not intended. (I welcome a better term.) The point is that the benefits of the preacher’s words can be obtained by someone not in the room with the preacher, receiving the words by means other than hearing them in person.

When it came to Eucharist online, transmissibility came into dispute. Thus, Quivik challenged the very notion of transmissibility of benefits into eucharistic elements, saying that this was assigning magic powers to the words of the presider (Schmit 2020). Timothy Wengert and Gordon Lathrop argued that to hear preaching was necessary but to receive Holy Communion was not, since—for Luther—the Word itself is sacramental (Wengert and Lathrop 2020, p. 2). In other words, grace could travel through words (spoken over the internet) so there was no need to eat and drink anything. Deanna Thompson turned the argument around, arguing “[I]f God is *really present* through the Word . . . it is worth reflecting on the theological possibility of the real presence of the Word incarnate in, with and through the experience of virtual communion” (Thompson 2020). The Roman Catholic archdiocese of New York encouraged its members to view remotely a priest celebrating Mass and to thereby participate in a “spiritual communion”, an “ardent desire to receive Jesus in the Most Holy Sacrament” at a time when communion was not possible (Burridge 2022, p. 22). Something transmitted, but it wasn’t the sacrament. Everyone agreed that the Word and its benefits could travel. The question was whether the Word could be bread and wine at multiple remote locations.

By “validity of community”, I mean what constitutes a bona fide gathering. In discussions of online worship, it is a point of contention whether online gatherings are valid for the purpose of celebrating Eucharist. The validity of a gathering does not appear to be a factor in whether a sermon can transmit its benefits. What is debated is whether the benefits of Eucharist can “transmit” such that a valid community exists at multiple points connected through technology.

For Quivik, what makes the Eucharistic meal so important is the gathering of people in physical proximity. This precludes any remote or online liturgy from being (what I call) valid for Eucharist (Schmit 2020). At the opposite pole, Deanna Thompson argues from her pre-pandemic experience as a cancer patient in isolation that online community is

real: “These virtual connections were not simply poor substitutes for real interaction; they filled my soul at a time of despair” (Thompson 2020). The Episcopal Church USA provides perhaps the sharpest statement on the matter. Presiding Bishop Michael Curry writes that sacraments are “communal actions”, “physical and social realities that are not duplicable in the virtual world” (Burridge 2022, p. 21).

The relation of Eucharist to preaching does not seem to have played a role in the conversation about remote Eucharist (except to say that preaching was sufficient in lieu of Eucharist) or, more to my purposes, about remote *preaching*. At no point is it suggested that remote preaching might be missing the table. The Roman Catholic homily is part of the Mass, but those worshipping remotely are encouraged to trust that the Mass is happening somewhere, just not where they are. In protestant expressions, the relation between Word and Eucharist is largely understood as one-directional, from preaching to meal. It is not suggested in any debates about online protestant worship that a remote meal might complete proclamation, or preach by other means. One statement that came close was by the Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA). In March of 2020, the Office of the General Assembly issued an Advisory Opinion, noting that the PCUSA *Book of Order* contains provisions for a worshipping community’s session—or local governing body—to authorize Holy Communion even for gatherings that are not in-person. The same general rubric ties proclamation to Eucharist: “At all such [non-in-person] events, the Word is to be read and proclaimed” (*Book of Order* 2019, p. 97).

While there are nuances to the debate, it comes down to some variation of the following two sides: one side saying there is sufficient grace in the spoken word and/or virtual community is invalid; and the other side saying that virtual community is valid and/or if a sacramental word can travel over the internet, then it can get into bread and wine. To-date, official teachings have not evolved since the early days of the pandemic. Richard Burridge’s preliminary study reveals that the practice of online communion exists even though it is usually officially discouraged or forbidden (Burridge 2022, pp. 1–25). As a result, some worshipping communities explicitly offer Eucharist to those worshipping online. Some tacitly permit it. Some assume viewers at home are not taking communion. Some expect remote worshippers to gather in online waiting rooms while those in person partake of the sacrament. I think that the relationship between preaching and Eucharist offers a way around the impasse. The route begins with Marion.

### 1.3. Forward with Marion

Marion’s eucharistic hermeneutic presents preaching and Eucharist as two parts of a single action.<sup>3</sup> In this action, bread and wine become the “real presence” of Christ (Marion 1991, p. 176). Real presence is a concept used by Catholics, Lutherans and others to confess how Christ is in the Eucharist. It means Christ is really there, “given for you”. Theories such as transubstantiation are explanations of the more basic article of faith that Christ is in the meal as promised. Marion explains “real presence” from his phenomenology of givenness. Phenomena give themselves in different ways, most profoundly in the aspect of what Marion calls the “icon”. A phenomenon is an icon in that “it no longer offers any spectacle to the gaze and tolerates no gaze from any spectator, but rather exerts its own gaze over that which meets it” (Marion 2002, p. 232). The Other is not so much seen as it sees. In the Eucharist, Christ is present “iconically”. We see bread and wine; Jesus Christ, obfuscated from our gaze as bread and wine, sees us. In the Eucharist, “the Word in person, silently, speaks and blesses . . . ” (Marion 1991, p. 151). In a way that defies definitive explanation, in an incarnate manner that nonetheless is not flesh and blood except to faith, Christ is in Eucharist. As such, he is an Other, regarding us while not himself easily regarded. Bread and wine simply do not look like a human!

Following Marion and operating within a phenomenology of givenness, one could say that preaching is rooted in the proclamation of Christ himself who is present iconically in Eucharist. Christ the Eucharist preaches. The Eucharist is Christ interpreting himself, giving of himself non-verbally. This Christ who is really present is the source of proclamation. His



presence communicates in a way that differs from hearing and comprehending. As Marion puts it, the community “hears the text, verbally passes through it in the direction of the referent Word, because the carnal Word comes to the community, and the community into him” (Marion 1991, p. 152).

Marion’s position is Catholic; I believe there is something to that catholicity that helps us conceive of preaching and Eucharist remotely. Preaching happens, even remotely. But if preaching is grounded in the Eucharist, then it would follow that preaching remotely is possible *because of* the Eucharist. Instead of debating whether community is valid or whether grace can transmit online—and thereby approve or reject a remote Eucharist—I submit that the Church should approach the matter from the other direction. We have proclamation because of Christ’s real presence. We have proclamation in remote worship because of Christ’s real presence. Eucharist clearly can happen because proclamation is happening, and preaching comes from Christ present in the Eucharist. Eucharist can happen *remotely* because proclamation is happening *remotely*, and proclamation comes from Christ present *remotely* in the Eucharist. Furthermore, preaching without Eucharist is still, in Marion’s terms, a hermeneutic calling out for completion. The hermeneutic for a remote worshipper is not finished until the bread is eaten and the wine is drunk. The hermeneutic is “unresolved” until completed in the Eucharistic meal. Therefore, not only is Christ present in remote worship, in a Eucharistic manner, but Christ offers to complete our hermeneutic as food.

#### 1.4. Consequences

I anticipate a number of objections. I will address five which are, I believe, within the scope of this essay. This is not done in order to deny other objections. One objection: this is too Catholic a view of Holy Communion. This objection can be paired with another, which is that Roman Catholics are, as of this writing, not permitted to celebrate such remote Masses.

As to the first objection, it is true that my sacramental theology leans hard toward the Catholic end of the spectrum, at least compared to many protestants. If we perceive Eucharist as more of a memorial than Christ’s presence, we are more likely to see the table as an extension of the Word. This, however, returns to Quivik’s observation that Luke 24 “is telling us something about how we learn”, and that “intending to feed on what will give us another day of life . . . tells us something about Jesus, the bread of life” (Quivik 2009, p. 81). Surely Eucharistic eating and drinking in remote worship could help worshippers know something about Christ in their worship location, maybe *especially* if they feel isolated.

Bread and wine would be more easily grasped as Christ present, even in remote worship, than would words alone. This claim finds an unlikely proponent in Martin Luther. Obviously, Luther was not describing worship via remote means, a technological impossibility in the 1500s. He did, however, describe how Christ was present. More specifically, Luther was insistent that the risen Jesus Christ was bodily present everywhere. This is Luther’s doctrine of the ubiquity, a consequence of Christ’s two natures as defined under the Council of Chalcedon. “If you can say, ‘Here is God,’ then you must also say, ‘Christ the man is present too’” (Luther 1961, p. 218). It is the linchpin of Luther’s assertion that Christ is really present in Eucharist. In the course of his argument, Luther offers an illustration. A preacher speaks with one voice, which passes to an unlimited number of listeners while remaining one voice, present in so many listeners. Luther then asserts:

“My friend, if God can do this with a physical voice, why should he not be able to do it far more easily with the body of Christ, even if it were at a particular place, as they say, and yet at the same time be truly in the bread and wine at many places, as it were in two ears? For his body is much quicker and lighter than any voice, and all creation is more permeable to him than the air is to the voice, as he proved in the case of [Christ’s] gravestone, inasmuch as no voice can pass through stone as easily as Christ’s body does”. (Luther 1961, p. 225)

In other words, Luther argues that it is easier to believe Christ is in bread and wine at multiple locations than it is to believe he is present in words. And, for Luther, Christ's presence in the Word is a given. The argument follows the same flow as mine: if Christ is present in preaching, then it follows that he is present Eucharistically. And if it is easier to believe that Christ is bodily present in bread and wine than in words, then the Eucharist makes sense as an aid to proclamation. I contend that Eucharist celebrated remotely is an aid to proclamation heard remotely.

I would be remiss in mentioning Quivik without mentioning her opposition to remote celebrations of Eucharist. Early in the pandemic, she declared that what “makes this meal so important, so sacred, so sacramental . . . is the gathering of the body of Christ”. Quivik's position has not changed. In a paper presented at the 2023 North American Academy of Liturgy Annual Meeting, Quivik wrote, “Gordon Lathrop's *The Assembly* offers strong historical and theological considerations, setting the stage for the case to be made that gathering in person is required for sacramental integrity” (Quivik 2023, p. 6). I have a hard time getting past the claim that human work (other than that of Christ) is required for something so broadly understood as a gift from Jesus to the Church.

Indeed, this privileging of human work seems to underly a whole range of objections to remote worship. An in-person gathering is suggested as preventing the commodification of the sacraments, as though in-person events such as concerts are not routinely commodified. An in-person gathering is also offered as a means to prevent making worship attendance too easy. Quivik writes, “When the church seeks to connect through virtual worship with those who are unchurched or absent for other reasons, the church accommodates those for whom absence is a convenience” (Quivik 2023, p. 5). Heaven forbid going to church be too easy! This insistence on being present in person rather than church being too easy is simply and unabashedly exclusivist. Furthermore, it would seem that Quivik's own pre-pandemic argument is ignored. If Eucharist proclaims something that the words alone do not, it would make sense to include Eucharist in remote worship, to let Eucharist preach. Quivik now appears to reject any kind of remote worship action on the grounds that it is not an in-person gathering. It is not clear if this rejection includes preaching. If it does, this is one of the few cases of preaching being rejected unless you are within earshot (which raises all kinds of questions about sound systems, hearing loss, and preachers with poor diction!).

As to the second objection, I do think that I have raised a question that the current ban on remote Eucharist—in Catholic and Protestant settings—does not answer. It is the job of theology to deal with reality. If Eucharist is possible (already happening, and perhaps is preferable) remotely, then theologies of consecration of elements, ordination and ministry of priests, etc., might have to adjust. The question of archives and repertoire, raised by Kim-Cragg in terms of postcolonial knowledge, arises again, here. Is the celebrant the keeper of the archive or the leader of a repertoire? According to Kim-Cragg, the answer is “both”. The act of celebrating Eucharist demonstrates its hybridity. “Even if we do it often, and repetitively, it is never the same. We can never totally and forever capture what it is in the same way. In Eucharist, there is alterity and irreducibility that liberates and reverses the status quo” (Kim-Cragg 2016, p. 81). The very act of Eucharist calls into question limits that we would place on Eucharist.

The matter of Eucharistic presidency brings me into direct confrontation with a third objection: the role of the bishop in Marion's eucharistic hermeneutic. Marion presents the eucharistic hermeneutic within the Roman Catholic ministry structure, complete with lifetime episcopal appointments. The bishop is, by presidency at the eucharistic site, the “THEOLOGIAN PAR EXCELLENCE”, for whom priests serve as stand-ins because the bishop cannot be everywhere at once (Marion 1991, p. 152 ff.). The person of the bishop problematizes Marion's hermeneutic. Marion presents the bishop as the one who, by virtue of his Eucharistic knowledge of the Word, cannot be contradicted by any teacher of theology who wishes to remain in a teaching position (Marion 1991, p. 153). This is troublesome even in traditions with a high view of episcopacy. Marion ignores a hypothetical bishop who teaches contrary to the Eucharist, or aids and abets in criminal actions. Further-

more, he ignores the historical development of episcopacy and ministry, presuming a high view of contemporary Roman Catholic episcopal authority as the norm since that biblical Eucharistic moment in Luke 24.

The matter of the bishop is an unnecessary step for Marion to take. Marion's goal in this hermeneutic is (or at least is stated as) an attempt to avoid construing the presence of Christ as some sort of presence in the consciousness of the worshippers, rather than a real presence. This presence in consciousness Marion says is idolatry. As John Macquarrie observes, associating Christ's presence "with the physical elements has the advantage of drawing the worshippers beyond themselves" (Macquarrie 1993, pp. 99–101). I believe Macquarrie is correct in identifying the Eucharist, rather than the presider, as the key to Marion's hermeneutic.

A fourth objection is that multiple breads at multiple locations undermines the unity of the sacrament and contradicts certain teachings. For example, Roman Catholic teaching discourages the use of any bread but hosts consecrated in the Mass at which they are being distributed (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal* 2011, No. 85). Would not this preclude remote Mass? However, I am not suggesting the use of elements consecrated elsewhere. I am arguing that elements even at remote locations are the body and blood of Christ because preaching depends on that, and preaching is happening. Remote worship is worship. There is no reason to resort to "pre-consecrated" elements; Christ shows up anew. Nor does this practice undermine the sense of unity in the bread any more than the use of factory-made individual hosts or multiple loaves on a routine basis at in-person liturgies.

The fifth objection: does this not argue that Christ is present in private, thereby precluding any need for connecting to community? Certainly, those who reject online community as (what I call) invalid could contend that the scenario I describe is one of private, disconnected experience. The thrust of my argument is that Christ proves online community to exist by virtue of his being preached in it and through it. The act of preaching presumes an other. Someone besides me speaks. Such a community might be small, but it is community, not a lone individual.

## 2. Conclusions

For an essay ostensibly about *preaching*, this has dwelt a great deal on questions of Eucharistic presence. What I have done, though, is to investigate the relationship between Word and Eucharist. I have argued that the two belong together. I have shown that, by and large, the Church accepts that the Word is preached remotely, and officially opposes remote celebration of the Eucharist. I have argued that in doing so the Church undercuts its understanding of the relationship between Word and Eucharist. Eucharist is part of one Word and Eucharist action. If the Word himself preaches from a Eucharist which is present for its recipient, and that is how we have preaching, then Christ is present Eucharistically and the proof is in the preaching. In other words, the challenge before the Church is not one of virtual representation, transmissibility and validity; the challenge is that preaching shows Christ to be present Eucharistically in remote worship and the Church is arguing that Christ is not there.

Eucharist as a partner to preaching is already happening remotely. It is possible, because Christ is really present. It is preferable, because preaching and Eucharist are partners. And it is happening, despite the wide range of official statements disapproving it. The church has reached an "Acts 11" moment with remote Eucharist. In Acts 11, Peter tells the Church in Jerusalem that in the course of his preaching to gentiles, the Holy Spirit fell upon them. "If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?" (Acts 11:17) One might respond that the Church nonetheless imposed rules on the Gentiles at the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15. Yes, they did. Rules will have to exist. As for the rules imposed in Acts 15, I will note that most churches today do not forbid food served at civic events or social clubs (our closest corollary to sacrifices to idols) or rare steak. Clearly, even these rules can change. Remote preaching has been with us for some time, and it is not going away. *That this preaching is preaching is due to the presence of Christ in it.*



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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> It bears mentioning that Marion does not explicitly root his project in anything resembling postcolonial theory, but rather that Marion shares many sources with it.
- <sup>2</sup> Marion acknowledges that the transition in Luke 24, from Jesus' interpretation of Scripture to his breaking of bread, appears abrupt, and could lead the reader to conclude that we do not know what Jesus said "concerning himself"—that is, that we do not know what his "hermeneutic" was. Marion asks: why separate the actions, here? Why assume that verses 28 and 29—in which the disciples ask Jesus to stay with them—break up two essentially different actions, preaching and Eucharist? What if they don't? What if the four verses are narrating one complete action? Jesus preaches, the disciples respond by asking him to stay, and Jesus breaks bread. The entire preaching–prayer–Eucharist event is a single action (Marion 1991, p. 150ff).
- <sup>3</sup> In making this claim, Marion is in the stream of conversation about the sacramentality of the Word in Roman Catholic theology. He echoes the observation of Otto Semmelroth (as summarized by Paul Janowiak) that "the proclamation of the word and sacramental worship are 'complementary functions' of a 'single work' ... As such, the grace bestowed in sacramental enactment flows from this 'unified whole'" Janowiak (2000, p. 21f). Janowiak cites Semmelroth (1965a, p. 41; 1965b, p. 232).

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