

The Biblical Theology of Benedict XVI: The Cross and the Eucharist

I. INTRODUCTION: a. Foundational elements of Benedict's biblical theology remain his insistence on 1) the "indivisibility" of the Old and New Testaments; and, 2) Jesus Christ and Christ's New Covenant Church as the true meaning of the plan of salvation intended by God from the beginning.

b. In Jesus and his Church, God's covenant plan of including all humanity into a divine family begins to be fulfilled: God's fidelity to this plan, announced in covenants to Abraham and Moses, is revealed in Jesus and the founding of his church, and awaits its definitive consummation at end of ages.

c. The Church established by Jesus on the basis of his new interpretation of the OT and on the sacrament of the Eucharist is the realization "in practice" of the Kingdom he proclaimed.

d. The Church is the Kingdom: the "people of God:" 1) gathered by faith in the salvific event of the cross
2) which is remembered and renewed in the *liturgy of the Eucharist*.

II. MEANING OF THE CROSS: a. For Benedict XVI, the event of the cross is best understood according to the interpretation Jesus himself gives during the Last Supper:

1) The Cross is a liturgical-sacrificial act by which God is making a new covenant with humanity, fulfilling the expectations and inner meaning of Old Testament Salvation History.

2) Jesus' words at the Last Supper bring together Israel's covenantal history; echo prophets and Psalms.

3) Jesus' climactic declarations, "This is my body..." "This is my blood..." come from Israel's cultic ritual, particularly the blood of the Passover and the Covenant at Sinai to which he refers directly.

4) New Covenant: Jesus' use of "new covenant in my blood" (Lk 22:20) not only looks back to Moses and Sinai but also looks beyond the old covenant to Jeremiah's promise of a new one which will spring from a new love of God and will give us a "new heart."

III. THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS. A. Cross of Christ a Turning Point in history of religion: on the cross, new understanding of God and worship spring from the seeds of ancient sacrifice, including Israel's.

1) Since the Fall, humanity, estranged from God, was unable to escape its own selfishness, sin, guilt which prevented man from giving himself wholly to God.

2) Sacrifices of bulls, goats or grain were pale substitutes & replacements for the love we could not give

3) Over time, OT records Israel's growing awareness of the hollowness and ineffectiveness of substitute sacrifice, with Israel's psalms and prophets reflecting God's complaints, "The world and all that is in it is mine. Do I eat the flesh of bulls and drink the blood of goats?" (PS 50: 12-13)

B. Significance of New Covenant. 1) Gauged in light of Sinai covenant (Ex 24:6,8) when Moses sprinkled the blood of the covenant on the altar and the people to symbolically make Israel & God blood brothers

2) Jesus' uses same words at Last Supper, but, unlike Sinai, offers Himself not a substitute as sacrifice!

- 3) The kinship made possible by Jesus sacrifice is thus, not symbolic or representative, but real.
 - 4) He who is true God and true man gives himself to the Father and in dying brings all to the Father.
- C. Cross the Key for understanding the true nature of sacrifice and worship, as well as Christ's mission
- 1) By the cross, divine self-offering is made the pathway and model for human worship of God.
 - 2) On the cross, a truly pure and innocent man offers himself for the love of God & obedience to His will.
 - 3) Early Church knew that Jesus' words at Last Supper would have been an empty gesture without the reality of the cross and the resurrection.
 - 4) True love can give nothing less than itself. Thus, the Temple curtain is torn; from now on, there is no worship but participation in the love of Jesus Christ...
- D. Drama of the Cross is inseparably bound as a single "Paschal Mystery" with the words, gestures and promises of the Last Supper and the event of the Resurrection:

-- Because he came from God, the true Lamb is not a sacrificial substitute or a replacement.

-- Because of his sacrifice, the true Lamb can deliver us and enable us to offer ourselves to God.

IV. THE EUCHARIST A. The Eucharist reveals the loving plan that guides all of Salvation Hx (Eph10:3,).

- 1) At the Eucharist, -- the Holy Trinity becomes fully a part of our human condition.
- 2) In the bread and wine, under whose appearances Christ gives Himself to us in the paschal meal (1 Cor 11:23-26), God's whole love encounters us and is sacramentally shared with us.

B. Eucharistic Liturgy is pivotal in Benedict's biblical theology:

- 1) World was made in the beginning *from* this ultimate encounter with the living God, *in* the Church!
- 2) World's encounter w/ Trinity occurs in the Liturgy of the New Covenant: the Eucharistic liturgy of the Church in which we have real contact with the Paschal mystery of Christ.
- 3) Eucharistic liturgy is far more than something the Church does; a set of ritual words/acts it performs.
- 4) Eucharistic Liturgy is in a very real sense what the Church is.
- 5) Everything in Church is ordered toward the liturgical gathering (Mass) and then purification of mankind, and serves to prepare us for the consummation of history in the divine liturgy of the cosmos.
- 6) The Church exists, not for her own sake, but for mankind, so that the world may know a sphere of God's presence; the sphere of the covenant between God and man.

7) The sphere of the covenant is the divinization of humankind; the union of God and humanity in which God is "all in all." (1Cor 15:28).

8) This will not be realized until the end of the age. Yet, it is anticipated and, in some fashion, accomplished in every celebration of the Eucharist.

V. LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST: THE "EMBRACE OF SALVATION" A. Liturgy: the privileged place where

1) we hear the divine Word which makes present the Lord's saving acts and

2) Community raises its prayer celebrating divine love.

3) God and man meet each other in an 'embrace of salvation' that finds fulfillment precisely in the liturgical celebration.

B. The Church is effectively realized in the liturgical celebration: 1) the prayer of the church becomes a participation in the love of God poured out on the Cross.

2) We are the people of God in no other way than on the basis of the crucified and risen body of Christ.

3) Simple description in Acts of the Church at Jerusalem in the days after the resurrection and ascension of Christ is of a complete liturgical Eucharist: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teachings, fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers..."

4) The Church in its essence can be seen most clearly in the liturgy and as the liturgy: For Benedict, "the Church is the Eucharist." The Church exists to adore and glorify God; to be that place on earth... in which the living God is worshipped and glorified in spirit and in truth.

5) As the community of Sinai came together to hear God's Word and to seal everything with sacrifice, the Eucharistic assembly of the church likewise serves for the renewal of the new covenant through the hearing of God's Word and offering of sacrifice.

C. Embrace of Salvation: 1) can happen only if we insert ourselves into the prayer of Jesus. We do this by becoming one with him in our own prayer of love; our own act of surrendering our lives to God.

2) Entrance into prayer of Jesus begins with Sacrament of Baptism where we become children of God, able in the Spirit to address God as Father.

3) Our prayer reaches its zenith in the Eucharistic Prayer of the Mass.

4) Our worship is never our own invention. Worship is a response to an invitation from above, a call and an act of love. We can respond to God's words and deeds in prayer and worship because He calls us into the dialog that He is.

VI. THE EUCHARIST: THE FESTIVAL OF THE RESURRECTION

A. The Eucharist is the feast of the new creation and the new covenant, the celebration of God's definitive entry into history and his conquest of death.

- 1) The event of the resurrection makes Christian liturgy decisively different from all others.
- 2) The Eucharist is the festival of the resurrection, the triumphant celebration of divine love being stronger than death.
- 3) What makes Christian liturgy unique is this victory over death and our belief that, in the body and blood of Christ, we share in this victory... that those who live for him will have life that no death can take away.
- 4) Gospel is the "Good News" of the death of death. This is more than new information for the believer. In the Eucharist, the Word of the Cross becomes the Word of Salvation for all who believe.

B. CHRISTIANITY: 1) Not only informative but performative: Christian message not just communication of good news. It makes things happen and is life-changing.

2) In the liturgy, God's Word is truly the "Word of Transformation," enable us to participate in the hour of Christ... It is the word of power that transforms the gifts of the earth in an entirely new way into God's gift of himself. And, it draws us into this process of transformation...