

Open wounds: COVID-19, eucharist and the mystical body of Christ

Bess Brooks

This chapter discusses the effect on the mystical body of Christ, the church, and of curtailing the celebration of online Eucharists during the Covid-19 pandemic. Firstly, I situate the discussion of zoom Eucharists in the context of recent work on online worship by Teresa Berger and others. I argue that the online believer is bodily present at worship and that the members of a local church can be suitably gathered in a virtual space to receive the sacrament. Secondly, I consider the effect of Eucharistic loss on the mystical body of Christ, the church, through the lens of trauma. I examine the characteristics of trauma as outlined by Karen O'Donnell, applying them to this specific context, and contend that the loss of the Eucharist is traumatic for that mystical body. Thirdly, I suggest that the absence of the Eucharistic entails the loss of opportunities to encounter both real presence and real absence. The trauma to the mystical body is compounded. Fourthly, I consider the practice of Spiritual Communion and argue that this does not obviate the “benefits” of consuming consecrated elements. All in all, the mystical body of Christ and the church encounters layers of trauma.

Introduction

What is the effect on the mystical body of Christ, the church, and of curtailing the celebration of online Eucharists during a pandemic?

During the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020–2021, church buildings were closed to worshippers in Belgium for lengthy periods of time. At key moments of the crisis, many individuals or families were themselves under lockdown at home and could not meet “in-person” with other believers. Local churches learned to gather together in zoom-type sessions, and services could sometimes be livestreamed from largely empty buildings to people “watching” at home.

The Church of England, (CofE), part of the world-wide Anglican communion, published a series of guidance acknowledging that “[w]hen services of Holy Communion are broadcast live (whether live-streamed or through videoconferencing), those who tune in are participating in a real Eucha-

ristic assembly” (The House of Bishops Recovery Group 2020, 6). However, the same guidance indicated that believers could not fully participate in the Eucharist during these virtual services. This is because “participants should not be encouraged to believe that any bread and wine brought before screens during online Holy Communion has been ‘remotely consecrated’” (The House of Bishops Recovery Group 2020, 7). That is to say, there was “real Eucharistic assembly” without “real Eucharist”. Acknowledging the expertise and profound reflection behind the guidance, and its intentions, the practical impact in the context of the pandemic was significant. Members of local CofE churches in Belgium (part of the CofE Diocese in Europe) could not receive the sacrament of bread and wine in physical form for weeks, and sometimes months, at a time. Anecdotally, local Anglican churches either fasted from the celebration of the Eucharist completely because of this restriction in the guidance, or celebrated online with the majority of the participants encouraged to





practise Spiritual Communion only (The House of Bishops Recovery Group 2020, 6).

In such unprecedented adversity, the loss of the Eucharist was hard to understand, given that many aspects of life were experienced via zoom-type platforms during this period. Local churches established ways of acting as a worshipping community online, but were unable to follow that to a logical conclusion, that of consuming consecrated elements. The guidance's curtailment on this participation in the Eucharist in zoom-type settings seemed a puzzling limitation on the work of the Holy Spirit. From a pastoral perspective, wasn't this the one moment when the consolation and strengthening action of the sacrament was needed above all? In a world-wide crisis, surely this was the moment to facilitate, not hinder, "faithful connections"?

In reflecting on this subject, I am taking advantage of the invitation expressed in the CofE guidance, in which the authors "... commend the questions raised by [the practice of consuming bread and wine before a screen] for further theological reflection" (The House of Bishops Recovery Group 2020, 7). The issues at stake are wide-ranging and complex involving, among other things, the purview of the Holy Spirit, CofE canon law, nuances in sacramental theology, differing understandings of priesthood and access to designated buildings. However, my narrower focus here is on the body in various guises: the body of Christ (the sacrament of the Eucharist); the wounded body of Christ himself; the individual human body and, above all, the corporate body of the believers which we call the church (the mystical body of Christ).

The chapter is written in four short sections, concentrating on two situations where the local church (i) fasted from celebrating the Eucharist completely as a result of the guidance, or (ii) celebrated the Eucharist in a zoom-type setting and the participating believers were encouraged to practise Spiritual Communion (they could not consume consecrated elements). First of all, I situate the discussion of zoom Eucharists in the context of recent work on online worship by Teresa Berger and others following the emergence of Web 2.0. I argue that the online believer is bodily present at worship and that the members of a local church can be suitably gathered in a virtual space to receive the sacrament. Secondly, I consider the effect of Eucharistic loss on the mystical body of Christ, the church, through the lens of trauma. I examine the characteristics of trauma as outlined by Karen O'Donnell, applying them

to this specific context, and contend that the loss of the Eucharist is traumatic for that mystical body. Thirdly, I suggest that the absence of the Eucharistic entails the loss of opportunities to encounter both real presence and real absence, and so the trauma to the mystical body of Christ is compounded. Fourthly, I consider the practice of Spiritual Communion and argue that this does not obviate the "benefits" of consuming consecrated elements. All in all, the mystical body of Christ, the church, encounters layers of trauma.

Unless otherwise specified, I am using "zoom" to represent any online platform which allows a group of people to gather and participate in an event at a specific point in time. So, I assume that a celebration of the Eucharist via zoom is a virtual synchronous gathering of an identifiable local group of people, most of whom would "normally" be in a physical building together at some point on Sunday morning. I am aware that the discussion of "online Eucharists" could, and no doubt should, be set in a much broader context than this but such settings are not the focus of this essay.

The body of Christ at worship following the emergence of Web 2.0

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted, or ruptured, the weekly pattern of Sunday gatherings of local CofE churches in Belgium and forced a deeper encounter with life online. Such technological developments, so familiar in other areas of life, might barely have impinged on the corporate worship of this kind of church until now. This is in contrast with large (sometimes mega-) churches of other denominations which regularly beam services to multiple locations around the world. Is an online believer present bodily in that "virtual" act of worship and can groups of "bodies" be seen as gathered together for the purposes of celebrating the Eucharist?

My intention here is not to claim that online worship "feels exactly the same" as so-called in-person worship. It is, however, to argue that, one, the boundaries between the two are more blurred than might be obvious at first glance and, two, the online worshipper is bodily present. It is therefore possible to understand that a local church, a particular expression of the mystical body of Christ, is able to gather via zoom to fully participate in the sacrament.

Discussions about the interplay between digital technology and the way in which we worship are not

new (Berger 2018, 7). Key concerns might be: firstly, the intrusion of “artificial” technology into traditional “pure” worship practices; secondly, the hard boundary between real and unreal worlds; thirdly, questions such as “can the worshiper truly be present online”? (This is not an exhaustive list).

As a general principle, it is important “not to compare an ideal or idealised version of liturgical life offline with the worst of digitally mediated liturgical practices” (Berger 2018, 10). To counter the first concern above, “Christian worship should not be understood as an originally unmediated or pre-mediated world to which (artificial?) media technologies then came to be added” (Berger 2018, 7). Indeed, Christianity has always used “historical media forms” such as “bodily techniques (e.g. hands raised in prayer, kneeling, cantillation), oral communication, scrolls, oil lamps, and astronomical computations, to name just a few” (Berger 2018, 7). As she says, current “digitally mediated liturgical practices [should be] interpreted within a larger trajectory of mediated practices in worship across time” (Berger 2018, 8). Moreover, it is bodies themselves which are “the basic materiality and prime media of Christian worship” (Berger 2018, 16).

Secondly, the divide between the real and virtual world is not as deep as might first appear. Prayer and worship are not divorced from the general movement towards the fuller integration of online and offline behaviour in our lives since the emergence of the highly interactive Web 2.0 (Berger 2018, 17). “Today, daily living is no longer divided into ‘online’ and ‘offline’ time or practices...[It], in other words, is digitally infused” (Berger 2018, 17).

Thirdly, there is no such thing as disembodied worship. As Berger points out (2018, 19): “Digitally mediated practices are material practices, as are all offline liturgies. In the case of digitally mediated worship, the material practice is enabled, foundationally, by the interface of a human body with a computer or other internet-accessing device. Digitally mediated practices of prayer and worship cannot be separated either from a physical body or from materiality.” The body is present and primary online and the online worshipper is able to actively participate, not only in the sense of conscious focus on what is happening, and “singing along with the hymns” but often to respond digitally as well e.g. with candle lighting or whatever other action is required (Berger 2018, 21–23).

As a further part of this whole discussion, it is worth remembering the other side of the coin—that

is, how many believers participate in so-called in-person worship with highly technologically-enhanced bodies, in services which often benefit from a great deal of technology too, for example, lighting, sound, music videos (Berger 2018, 20).

The question then becomes whether “isolated” believers online can truly be said to be gathered together for the purposes of celebrating the Eucharist? That is to say, can there be a real ecclesial community online? Daniella Zsupan-Jerome (2015, 542) establishes “the case for a relational understanding of presence in digital communication”. Berger suggests that “we forgo arguing whether ecclesial community *can* exist online—everything indicates it already does” (Berger 2018, 44). Sarah Johnson affirms this in her recent work during the Covid-19 pandemic: “Christian community clearly can and does exist online (2020, 191). Indeed, as I have said, the CofE, acknowledges “real Eucharistic assembly” when believers participate in the live broadcast of Holy Communion (see above).

Eucharistic loss through the lens of trauma

I will now consider my opening question on the effect on the mystical body of Christ, the church, of curtailing the celebration of online Eucharists during a pandemic. (By “curtailing”, I mean the acknowledgement of “real Eucharistic assembly” without “real Eucharist”, i.e., the consumption of consecrated bread and wine). I consider this issue through the lens of trauma, particularly focussing on the idea of trauma as rupture, or wounding, to the body. My main conversation partner in this part of the paper is Karen O'Donnell, particularly her work *Broken Bodies* (O'Donnell 2019). Although trauma is a term originally associated with the medical profession and, more recently, with branches of psychiatry, I will present its relevance to this current day practical issue in the church. I will argue that the loss of the Eucharist wounds this mystical body and, as such, is traumatic. The body is denied the body.

There is no single definition of trauma but O'Donnell (2019, 6) considers that it is above all centred on “*rupture*” which she perceives as taking place in three ways. Firstly, a person undergoes some kind of “rupture in body integrity” which might be “a feeling of being unsafe, or an experience of injury or invasion of the body” (O'Donnell 2019, 6). The second rupture is one of time—this



might be experienced as the intrusion of long-ago trauma into the current moment by means of “flash-backs or nightmares” (O’Donnell, 2019 7). Or, significantly from the point of view of this chapter, there might be “a blocking of the memory of the traumatic event leading to a gap in their memory timeline” (O’Donnell 2019, 7). Thirdly, there is a “rupture in cognition and language” (O’Donnell 2019, 7). This could be because a person can’t clearly remember the details of the trauma and so “cannot access it in order to be able to understand it” (O’Donnell 2019, 7). Again, perhaps “the traumatic event is beyond cognition and the trauma survivor has no language with which to express what happened to them and how they felt about it” (O’Donnell 2019, 7).

O’Donnell emphasises that the idea of somatic memory is key to any attempt to understand trauma (O’Donnell 2019, 8). “The place where body and memory come together, for Christians, is in the Eucharist” (O’Donnell 2019, 14).

I am primarily concentrating here on situations where a local CofE church decides to fast from celebrating the Eucharist, as a consequence of the CofE guidance that a full Eucharist cannot be experienced online. I stress that what follows is not a demonstration of how the absence of the Eucharist has been traumatic in a literal, clinical sense. However, I am making connections with the description of trauma above which I think are significant in arguing that the mystical body of Christ, the church, has been wounded by what has taken place over the last months. In all of this, I note that the very existence of non-death loss itself can be traumatic (for an example from a very different context see Mitchell 2018). There is here, in a deeply inter-connected way, physical loss, loss of memory, loss of language, loss of witness, loss of the support to our faith that engaging in sacramental behaviour brings—and this is probably an incomplete list. This culminates in the ultimate breach of the body as I will outline below.

So, I will begin slightly out of sequence with O’Donnell’s second point about the “blocking of the memory of the traumatic event” and the “gap in [the] memory timeline”. The basis of the Eucharist is Jesus’ request that we repeat something in memory of him (Luke 22:19 NRSV). When there is Eucharistic loss, as during the pandemic, local expressions of the mystical body of Christ, the church, lose the opportunity to remember Jesus in the specific way afforded by those non-recoverable celebrations—for example, the participation in the Eucharistic prayers that retell

the story of what has happened, the gestures of receiving and the interplay between movement and memory, the allowing of the bread and wine into our own bodies and all the associations there, and the particular togetherness with the communion of saints at that moment. There is, almost literally, “a gap in [our] memory timeline” (O’Donnell 2019, 7).

Closely allied to this is O’Donnell’s third point about the lack of available language with which to express what has happened. If the Eucharistic celebration does not take place, including the relevant Eucharist Prayers and ritual enactment, then the church is truly left without words to remember the traumatic nature of Jesus life and death. I express it in this way because O’Donnell (2019, 123–124) indicates that she and Shelly Rambo (2010) locate the trauma in different aspects of the Jesus event. There is a compound effect—the traumatic loss of the Eucharist, and all which that comprises, is characterised by a loss of language in which to tell of the traumatic events the group of believers is remembering in some way.

Both the second and third point above are connected to the issues of witness testimony (O’Donnell 2019, 10–11). A gap in the timeline of our Eucharistic celebrations and the loss of language which prevents us from telling the story of our faith prevents us from bearing witness to the traumatic events we have encountered. Nor can the church perform what O’Donnell sees as one of its key tasks—that of being a “listening community” (O’Donnell 2019, 11). It cannot listen to itself. It does not hear itself repeat the foundational story of our faith in the context of the Eucharist with the consequent support and expression, or means of, grace.

All of this combines together to constitute the main trauma site—the wounding or rupture to the body of Christ (see O’Donnell’s first point above). Just as Jesus’ body was wounded on the cross, so his mystical body, the church, is wounded by this Eucharistic loss.

This section has focussed on the complete absence of the Eucharist; obviously, when online believers participate in “real Eucharistic assembly”, the effect on the mystical body of Christ, the church, is slightly different. The believer can participate in many aspects of the Eucharistic celebration. However, the loss of the consecrated elements remains.

The permanence of Eucharistic loss

The Eucharist, the remembrance in some way of Jesus, is “usually” repeated daily, weekly or monthly

by members of a local church community. But it can never be repeated identically. As O'Donnell points out using the phrase of Catherine Pickstock (2013, 177), the act of remembrance is a case of “non-identical repetition” (2019, 19). O'Donnell summarises this concept in the following way: “Non-identical repetition is a form of analogous repetition in which history and novelty are combined. All repetition is, inevitably, non-identical because it differs in location, intent, action and/or outcome” (2019, 19).

My point is that, if each celebration of the Eucharist is unique and cannot simply be repeated, then the loss of any Eucharists during the pandemic is significant. People might debate exactly what is being remembered during such a celebration, but those specific opportunities to recall the great story of our faith are gone forever and cannot be reclaimed. The situation is not rectified by simply “starting up the Eucharists again” once guidance or regulation allows. These celebrations are different to those that would have taken place—they are not a substitute or replacement. The loss to the body is irreplaceable. The trauma or wounding is deepened.

(Real) Presence and (Real) Absence

This chapter began with considerations of the bodily presence of the individual worshipper online and the consequence of that for the body of Christ gathered to celebrate the Eucharist. Entwined with the presence, or absence, of the believer are the concepts of the real presence or real absence of God. The loss of real presence and real absence in situations where a Eucharist cannot take place compounds the trauma to the mystical body of Christ.

The Absence of Presence

Larson-Miller details a number of ways a worshipper might understand God's real presence in the Eucharist, acknowledging “a God who is real and always present even in modalities; through creation, in the incarnation, in humanity, in suffering, in living and dying, in resurrection and ascension, in all places and in all times, and in sacramental liturgy, all ‘real’ (Larson-Miller 2016, 82). Such ways include, firstly, the notion of encounter, following work by Joseph Bracken and Martin Buber and their concept of intersubjectivity. “...[T]he understanding of all ecclesial sacraments as ‘encounter’ is faithful to a trajectory in sacramental theology of a meeting” (Larson-Miller 2016, 85–86).

Secondly, she notes (2016, 88) that “language is not an instrument but a *mediation*; it is *in* language that humans as subjects come to be” (Chauvet 1995, 87). One aspect of reinvigorating the way we understand “the creating word is to revitalize the understandings of symbols so that they are entered into as more than a sign or reminder but rather dynamic “transactions that disclose and embody relationships” (Chauvet 1995, 98). A further aspect of this is “to revisit the centrality of the whole person who encounters the unknown by means of the known” (Larson-Miller 2016, 88). That is to say, one way of encountering the unknown God is by means of the known bread and wine, the sacrament of the Eucharist.

Thirdly, she identifies the sacraments as one means of active participation in the life of the Trinity (Larson-Miller 2016, 112). “A re-remembering of the trinitarian activity in every sacramental encounter sustains the corporate reality of the Body of Christ, made in the image of God who is pure communion, as well as the temporal present of real presence. Participation in the triune God, with its deep structure of what real presence can mean, remains true to *anamnesis*, which is not a simple remembering of a past event but an acknowledgment of all that God has done and a recognition of the present reality of all God's actions and mercy” (Larson-Miller 2016, 102).

That is to say, the consequence of specific Eucharistic loss is the loss of an opportunity for encounter—this moment of (this kind of) real presence is absent; it is the loss of an opportunity to know the unknowable God through the known bread and wine; it is the loss of this kind of participation in the Trinity. These occasions to experience real presence through means of the sacrament are gone. As Larson-Miller observes, “the locus of Christian sacramental theology is the church, the real and mystical Body of Christ which is the dwelling place of the real and mystical Body of Christ found in the Eucharist” (Larson-Miller 2016, 103). The centrality of the Eucharist to the mystical body of Christ, the church, highlights the traumatic nature of the absence of presence and therefore of Eucharistic loss.

The Absence of Absence

Furthermore, according to Larson-Miller (2016, 107) in all of this there is a need for real presence to remain “in tension with absence”. This is, firstly, because of the impermanence of the Eucharist. As Lar-



son-Miller explains, “[r]eal absence is essential, because, as the apostle Paul wrote, ‘For as often as you eat the bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes’ (1 Cor 11:26). The Eucharist is temporary, something that the Body of Christ does between the first and second coming of Christ” (Larson-Miller 2016, 108). It bridges the gap in time.

Secondly, the tension between real presence and real absence reflects the fact that believers themselves currently live in the tension of already-but-not-yet. “Real absence reminds us that there is more, that this is not the fullness of the Christ’s presence, there is more yet to come... The real absence is a way of remembering the future presence, the full Parousia” (Larson-Miller 2016, 108–9).

Thirdly, real absence prevents the body of Christ, the church, from deluding itself that it can “possess or control the fullness of God’s presence” (Larson-Miller 2016, 108).

When the Eucharist itself is absent, then these opportunities to encounter real absence are also missing and so the body of Christ loses, among other things, a means of exploring the relationship between the past, present and future within God and of anticipating the wonder of what is to come. In a sense, there is an absence of absence or, perhaps, it is more helpful to speak about a compounded absence. Such absent absence intensifies the body’s (the church’s) wounds.

I am not suggesting that full participation in the Eucharist is the only means by which these things can be encountered, thought about or influenced. But I am saying that this is still a form of loss and therefore trauma to the mystical body of Christ, the church. A further nuance is this: during the lockdown periods of the pandemic, some priests “fasted” from celebrating the Eucharist in solidarity with their flock. However, in cases where they did not, the priests concerned did not suffer various aspects of trauma outlined in the pages above. The mystical body of Christ was wounded in another way—a painful division between those who could remember, speak, ingest and experience particular modes of real presence and absence, and those who could not.

This division or wounding is all the more heightened because, in an online Eucharist, there is little reason to understand anything as “absent” other than the physical (“in-person”) presence of other believers. I have already shown that the community of worshippers can be viewed, individually, as bodi-

ly present in worship and, corporately, as present to each other (that is to say, gathered together). Moreover, and above all other considerations, God is present too—as Teresa Berger points out (2013, 82).

Spiritual Communion

In *Common Worship*, the *Notes on The Celebration of Holy Communion at Home or in Hospital With the Sick and Housebound* state under the heading of Spiritual Communion that “Believers who cannot physically receive the sacrament are to be assured that they are partakers by faith of the body and blood of Christ and of the benefits he conveys to us by them” (CofE website, accessed 2022). This seems to indicate that physical consumption of bread and wine is not totally necessary to fully participate in Holy Communion. Indeed, during the lockdowns, members of the CofE were encouraged to practice Spiritual Communion as I have said (for example, The House of Bishops Recovery Group 2020, 6). Does this negate the argument that members of the CofE were “prohibited” from receiving the Eucharist at certain moments during the pandemic, or invalidate a discussion of the metaphorical effect of this on the body of Christ, the church?

Firstly, I would argue that an understanding of spiritual communion, and its validity, does not obscure the “benefits” of physically consuming the consecrated elements. One thing does not simply replace the other. Although believers worshipping online can participate in many elements of the service of Holy Communion without consumption (see the CofE position on “real Eucharistic assembly” mentioned above), there is genuine value in the gathered people of God “enacting the full ritual in all its complex movements” (Fink 1984, 22). The individual parts of the liturgy most fully signify the presence of Christ as all of them interact with each other—they cannot easily be separated out, according to him (see Fink 1984, 22).

Secondly, while acknowledging there are times when this is not humanly possible, some of the main significance of the Eucharist is that the members of the body of Christ actually consume the bread and wine—that these items rupture the physical integrity of the individual and are taken into their human body. In Angel F. Mendez Montoya’s terms: “That is, God initiates a radical self-giving by becoming food itself, incorporating—and thus transfiguring—humanity into Christ’s body” (2009, 3). Even where an

individual's understanding of the Eucharist is that the elements are "just symbolic" there is still great meaning in taking everything that they represent into oneself.

Thirdly, is there a need to deny that consecration of the elements set before a believer's screen has taken place, when there is "real Eucharistic assembly" in a zoom-type setting? As the CofE priest and scholar, Richard A. Burrige, writes: "I cannot understand why [his friend's] bread and wine, which I can see and touch and pray over on my laptop screen, cannot be open to the real presence of Christ just as my own bread and wine", (2022, 259). And again: "[...] who am I to say that Jesus cannot fill her elements of bread and wine with his divine and real presence, just as much as I pray that he does mine—regardless of the geographical distance between us, however measured" (Burrige 2022, 259).

In summary, the fact that the practice of Spiritual Communion exists, and is valid for certain purposes, does not negate the wounding to the body when full participation in online Eucharists is curtailed, that is when the believer is prevented from consuming consecrated elements.

Conclusion

To return to my original question: the mystical body of Christ, the church, has experienced multi-layered trauma as a consequence of the CofE guidance curtailing the celebration of online Eucharists during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic itself has been traumatic in the sense that normal life has been disrupted/ruptured for people living in Belgium and in the fact that the effects of this will continue long after the event itself is technically over. That trauma has been compounded by denying the Eucharist (the body of Christ) to the mystical body of Christ, the church, and the consequent loss of faith support and pastoral benefit (among other things).

More specifically, where Eucharistic fasting has taken place, the believing body of Christ has been prevented from remembering, speaking about and witnessing to the crucial story of our faith, and from respecting the commandment of Jesus to "do this in remembrance of him"—an act of remembrance which is not "the same" each time but is different with each repetition. The narrative of the worshipping community becomes one in which the pattern

of celebrating the Eucharist is disrupted. Even where a Eucharistic service has been broadcast live, there has been "real Eucharistic assembly" without "real Eucharist" – a celebration which includes the possibility of consuming consecrated elements. The practice of Spiritual Communion is not a full replacement for this.

Such Eucharistic loss is traumatic. In particular, the mystical body of Christ has lost the opportunity for specific Eucharistic encounters with the real presence and absence of Jesus Christ.. The body endures layers of trauma and is deeply wounded.

The authors of the CofE guidance "... commend the questions raised by [the practice of consuming bread and wine before a screen] for further theological reflection" (CofE 2020). I suggest that these reflections take place, at least in part, within a framework of "presence and absence", specifically the question: who or what is present or absent when an online Eucharist takes place? Concerning the Divine, Teresa Berger (2013, 282) writes, "[t]heologically, we will have to presume that God is able to be present online as well as offline. Given that God is not shackled...we also have to presume that God can mediate God's saving grace both online as well as offline." So God is present and I have argued above that the worshipper is bodily present at worship, fully participative and gathered in community with his or her fellow believers (see Berger, and Zsupan-Jerome). Such gathering must include the priest who is presiding at the altar. The only thing that is absent is the so-called in-person co-presence of other people. Is this a reason for "denying" the body the body?

Perhaps another way to reflect on all this is through the lens of encounter, given that "daily living is no longer divided into 'online' and 'offline' time or practices" (Berger 2018, 17), and the heightened reality of this during the pandemic for local CofE churches. If truly the whole of life can be framed as "a sacrament of the encounter with God" (Morrill discussing Schillebeeckx 1999, 2), it seems important to consider how the mystical body of Christ can encounter the real presence of God in the particular way afforded by online Eucharists. This should include reflection on the need for the physical consumption of the elements.

These suggestions are made in the hope that, in a future world-wide crisis, there will be Eucharists celebrated online within the CofE as a means of strengthening "faithful connections".



References

- Berger, Teresa. 2013. "@Worship: Exploring Liturgical Practices in Cyberspace." *Questions Liturgiques* 94, p. 266–286.
- . 2018. *@Worship: Liturgical Practices in Digital Worlds*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Burridge, Richard A. 2022. *Holy Communion in Contagious Times: Celebrating the Eucharist in the Everyday and Online Worlds*.
- Church of England website. <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources-/common-worship/ministry-sick>. Accessed 13 April 2022.
- Chauvet, Louis-Marie. 1995. *A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*. Translated by Patrick Madigan and Madeleine Beaumont. Collegeville, MN: A Pueblo Book published by Liturgical Press.
- Fink, Peter. 1984. "Perceiving the Presence of Christ." *Worship* 58, p. 17–28.
- Johnson, Sarah Kathleen. 2020. "Online Communion, Christian Community and Receptive Ecumenism: A Holy Week Ethnography During COVID-19." *Studia Liturgica* 50, no. 2, p. 188–210.
- Méndez Montoya, Angel F. 2009. *Theology of Food: Eating and the Eucharist*. Illuminations: theory and religion. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Mitchell, Monique B. 2018. "'No One Acknowledged My Loss and Hurt': Non-death Loss, Grief and Trauma in Foster Care." *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal* 35, no.1, p. 1–9.
- Morrill, Bruce T, ed. 1999. *Bodies of Worship: Explorations in Theory and Practice*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press.
- National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. 2012. *New Revised Standard Bible*. Eighth Printing Hendrickson Publishers Edition. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.
- O'Donnell, Karen. 2019. *Broken Bodies: The Eucharist, Mary and the Body in Trauma Theology*. London: SCM.
- Pickstock, Catherine. 2013. *Repetition and Identity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rambo, Shelly. 2010. *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Schillebeeckx, Edward. 1963. *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*. New York: Sheed and Ward.
- The House of Bishops Recovery Group. 1 July 2020. "Coronavirus Advice on the Administration of Holy Communion v3.0.pdf." <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-07/Coronavirus%20Advice%20on%20the%20Administration%20of%20Holy%20Communion%20v3.0.pdf>. Accessed 13 July 2020.
- Zsupan-Jerome, Daniella. 2015. "Virtual Presence as Real Presence? Sacramental Theology and Digital Culture in Dialogue." *Worship* 89, no.6, p. 526–542.