

An Integral Eucharist? Pope Francis, Louis-Marie Chauvet, and Ecology's Relationship to Eucharist

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TODAY'S GLOBAL MARKETPLACE, extensive supply chains, and the severe ecological degradation to which the aforementioned realities contribute are far removed from the world in which Jesus and his early followers lived. But what is at stake is more than just a conflict of different cultures and time periods. The globalized structure of Western society carries with it the potential to flatten all other cultures.¹ Yet, the church must navigate this difficult terrain if it is to be the symbolic witness of Christ on earth today. In the essay that follows, I think through a series of ecological issues that arise in the church's attempt at such witness. I begin with a brief account of Pope Francis's vision of integral ecology as presented in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, particularly in connection with the sacrament of Eucharist. This account of Francis's link between Eucharist and ethics will lead to some unanswered questions of ecology in relation to the church's sacraments. Portions of Louis-Marie Chauvet's theology are then explicated and evaluated as a potential resource for addressing these questions. Finally, an account of the arrival of Eucharistic bread into the capitalist marketplace points to an additional set of issues not raised by either Francis or Chauvet. It is my contention that Francis's discussion of Eucharist needs to be further developed in its connection to ethical action, and Chauvet's discussion of Eucharist needs to expand its understanding of ethical action to include all of creation. A synthesis of the two perspectives can lead to a vision for Eucharist that attempts to keep in view all such connections, a vision I will call an "integral Eucharist."

¹ This comment is somewhat of a play on the title of Thomas Friedman's *The World Is Flat 3.0: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Picador, 2007).

LAUDATO SI'

Toward the end of *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis devotes paragraph 236 in its entirety to the topic of Eucharist. He says that "it is in the Eucharist that all that has been created finds its greatest exaltation" and that "the Eucharist joins heaven and earth; it embraces and penetrates all creation" (no. 236). In a statement that clearly connects the sacrament to ethical action, Francis closes the paragraph by saying, "The Eucharist is also a source of light and motivation for our concerns for the environment, directing us to be stewards of all creation" (no. 236). These "concerns for the environment" are what led Francis to write *Laudato Si'* and what motivate the integral ecology at the heart of the encyclical. Opening the fourth chapter, he says, "Since everything is closely interrelated, and today's problems call for a vision capable of taking into account every aspect of the global crisis, I suggest that we now consider some elements of an *integral ecology*, one which clearly respects its human and social dimensions" (no. 137). To understand how Francis envisions Eucharist being connected to environmental concerns, one has to understand his broader vision of an integral ecology.

An integral ecology is a way of seeing the interconnectedness of the world. It has an eye toward the connections between the environmental, political, economic, and social sectors of life among others. When the connections between these sectors are revealed, one realizes the environmental and social impacts of an economic system focused on short-term gains at the expense of particular regions of the planet, regions like Northern Appalachia. Such an awareness calls for practical dialogue and action at every level from that of individual decisions to international policy. A substantial change will require education and training and, ultimately, an "ecological conversion." When such changes happen *en masse*, consumers are able to "change the way businesses operate, forcing them to consider their environmental footprint and their patterns of production" (no. 206).

So, what should be made of Francis's vision of Eucharist in light of the papal call for an integral ecology? Can a sacramental understanding of Eucharist encourage the kind of ethical concern for the environment that leads to an awareness of such connections? In *Laudato Si'*, the connection is not as clear as it might be. Even if the Eucharist does encourage the vision of integral ecology, is that enough? What specific problems does an integral ecology help identify in Eucharistic practice today, and what actions can be taken as a result? As

a potential way of exploring such questions, the remainder of this essay engages the theology of Louis-Marie Chauvet.² Ultimately, Chauvet's understanding of the sacraments, while helpful in many ways, is not expansive enough on its own to provide a clear connection to the ecological issues already raised by Francis or additional issues such as the commodification of Eucharistic bread, which is not addressed by Francis and is discussed in the final part of the essay.

THE THEOLOGY OF LOUIS-MARIE CHAUVET

The theology of Louis-Marie Chauvet is complex and does not lend itself to simple summarization. Thus, the pages that follow do not pretend to be a comprehensive overview but instead seek the twofold aim of providing enough information to create a partner with which to dialogue and hinting at the most relevant aspects of that partnership with regard to the questions raised in response to *Laudato Si'*. In accomplishing this task, there are three aspects of Chauvet's theology that I will cover: his understanding and use of *symbol*, the *symbolic order* of Christian identity, and the connection between sacraments and ethics within *symbolic exchange*.³

Symbol

Symbol is an important starting place for discussion since much of Chauvet's sacramental theology, and thus, much of what is contained in the subsequent sections, is based on this concept, both in terms of what it is *not* as well as what it *is*. So, a proper genesis for this discussion is to state what symbol is *not* for Chauvet.

Chauvet makes clear early on in both of his books that his theology provides a critique and response to the problems arising from the onto-

² Though the following works will not be referenced directly in the following section, my understanding of Chauvet surely reflects their influence: Timothy M. Brunk, *Liturgy and Life: The Unity of Sacrament and Ethics in the Theology of Louis-Marie Chauvet* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), and Benjamin Durheim, *Christ's Gift, Our Response: Martin Luther and Louis-Marie Chauvet on the Connection between Sacraments and Ethics* (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2015).

³ In the presentation of Chauvet's theology that follows, I will rely exclusively on his two books *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, trans. Patrick Madigan and Madeleine Beaumont (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1995), and *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body*, trans. Madeleine Beaumont (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2001). Although I more closely follow the structure of *Symbol and Sacrament* by beginning with symbol rather than symbolic order, most of the content cited and engaged will come from *The Sacraments* due to its more concise style and argumentation. However, in using both works, it should be noted that I will be assuming a high degree of continuity, even though their original publication dates in French (1987 and 1997, respectively) are separated by a decade and interesting work could undoubtedly be done to attempt to locate any places of discontinuity.

theology of metaphysics.⁴ In providing this critique and response, he differentiates his concept of symbol from that of sign, particularly in connection to causality, which he claims is the result of a particular metaphysics. Chauvet, speaking about this metaphysics, says,

For whatever is without limits is, for it [metaphysics], beyond thought, defies all logic. The only logic possible is that of a first cause and of an absolute foundation for the totality of existents; that of a center playing the role of a fixed point; that of a presence, faultless, constant, stable.⁵

One can see from this statement how Chauvet conceives of metaphysics as a way of viewing reality in which causality is unavoidable. The state of “always-becoming,” for which Chauvet later argues, is impossible under the logic of causality with its emphasis on “a fixed point.” Another problem with the insistence on causality is its connection to the idea of production, which becomes especially problematic when viewed in relation to grace and the sacraments. Chauvet says,

On the one hand, *grace* can in no way be considered as an object or a value. It is the paradigmatic case of something that is a *non-object*, a *non-value*; otherwise, it runs the risk of being negated in the very graciousness and gratuitousness which in fact constitute it. On the other hand, in Scholastic discourse, the category of *causality* is always tied to the idea of production or augmentation; thus, it always presupposes an explanatory model implying production, sometimes of a technical, sometimes of a biological variety (the germ cell in development), a model in which the idea of “instrumentality” plays a pivotal role. Clearly there is an (apparently fundamental) heterogeneity between the language of grace and the instrumental and productionist language of causality.⁶

So, insofar as the scholastics incorporated causality into their definitions of sacrament, they viewed the sacraments as instruments of grace, and thus, grace could not be gratuitous. Even in his earliest works, Aquinas spoke of the sacrament as “in the genus of cause and sign” (*IV Sentences* d. 1, q. 1, a.1).⁷ However, by the time he wrote on the sacraments in the *tertia pars* of the *Summa Theologiae*, he spoke of sacrament as only “in the genus of sign” (*ST* III q. 60, a. 1).⁸ According to Chauvet, the switch to sign only was significant because Aquinas was attempting to understand the sacraments primarily in

⁴ The language of critique is much sharper in *Symbol and Sacrament* than in *The Sacraments*. See chapter 1 and chapter 4, respectively.

⁵ Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 44.

⁶ Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 7.

⁷ Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 14-15.

⁸ Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 14-15.

terms of representation rather than instrumentality. However, when Thomas moved past what the sacraments *are* to consider what it is that they *do*, he ended up falling back onto the explanatory ground of instrumentality (even if only by analogy). But, even with this nuance, Chauvet still finds in Thomas “an ever-present scheme of representation” that is “technical or productionist.”⁹

So then, what should the response be to this seemingly inescapable way of conceiving the sacraments that Chauvet claims is “still dominant in our own day”?¹⁰ His proposed solution is a reinterpretation of the sacraments as symbol rather than sign, with an emphasis on mediation rather than instrumentality. Anthropologically speaking, Chauvet claims that the sacraments are “expressions in word and rite,” and that as such, “they belong to what is called language.”¹¹ And language, for Chauvet, is not an instrument but mediation. The problem with the instrumental view of language is that it “presupposes an ideal subject who would stand outside language, therefore outside mediation, that is to say finally, outside body and outside history.”¹² However, Chauvet wants to say that reality is always mediated. Language is more than an instrument in that it actually participates in and is a part of the very “world” that it creates.¹³ He quotes linguist Emile Benveniste,

To speak of instrument is to oppose humankind and nature... We never see human beings separate from language and we never see them inventing it... What we find in the world are speaking human beings speaking to other human beings, and *language teaches us the very definition of human being*.¹⁴

Summarizing this understanding of language, Chauvet says, “Language is thus a construction game in a twofold sense: objective, of construction of reality as world and, subjective, of construction of the subject.”¹⁵ Language is not an obstacle to understanding the world or the self; it is the womb out of which such understanding comes. So, “to say that ‘there is speaking’ constantly in human beings is to say that every perception of reality is mediated by their culture and the

⁹ Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 22.

¹⁰ Chauvet, *Sacraments*, 95.

¹¹ Chauvet, *Sacraments*, 3.

¹² Chauvet, *Sacraments*, 4.

¹³ Chauvet’s anthropological understanding of “world” in this sense is “a signifying whole in which every element, whether material (tree, wind, house) or social (relatives, clothing cooking, work, leisure) is integrated into a system of *knowledge* (of the world and of society), *gratitude* (code of good manners, mythical and ritual code ruling relationships with deities and ancestors), and *ethical behavior* (values serving as norms of conduct).” See *The Sacraments*, 13.

¹⁴ Chauvet, *Sacraments*, 6-7.

¹⁵ Chauvet, *Sacraments*, 8.

history of their desire.”¹⁶ Every human being deals with the “world” not as something in its crude physical state, but as something “always-already constructed.”¹⁷

Recall that Chauvet considers the sacraments as belonging within this category of language. Thus, the sacraments too are not an instrument but a mediation. After having set up an alternative to the instrumental view of the sacraments and language in general, Chauvet moves into a discussion of *symbol*. Although the sacraments are expressions by means of language, “their language is of a peculiar type since it is primarily symbolic.”¹⁸ For his construction of symbol, Chauvet recalls an understanding from antiquity in which a symbol is “a piece of an object given to contracting parties in order to allow them or their descendants to recognize themselves as parties in this contract.”¹⁹ From this understanding, there are many differences that can be drawn out in comparison to the earlier notion of sign, with its connection to causality and production.²⁰ Thus, “what characterizes the symbol is not its material value in quantity or quality but its *relation* with the whole to which it belongs.”²¹ Since the symbol represents the whole to which it belongs, it actually does more than just represent; it carries the whole within itself and consequently *is* what it represents. Additionally, “In the symbol, as used in antiquity, the joining of the elements causes the recognition or the identification of the persons as partners in the same contract... it allows all persons to *situate themselves as subjects* in their relation with other subjects.”²² While the sign functions as an instrument, the symbol is an action between subjects.

The sacraments then, as symbolic *actions*, aim both to join Christ and the church and to join the members of the church as sisters and brothers in Christ.²³ They also aim to communicate the gratuitous grace of God and achieve this aim as symbols since the symbolic operates outside the logic of value. Additionally, the sacraments, through this process of symbolization, are able to function as both “revealer”

¹⁶ Chauvet, *Sacraments*, 13.

¹⁷ Chauvet, *Sacraments*, 13.

¹⁸ Chauvet, *Sacraments*, 69.

¹⁹ Chauvet, *Sacraments*, 70.

²⁰ This should not, however, be read to mean that symbol supersedes sign or that sign is not necessary. Rather, it is that the two offer different logics and function on different levels: sign belonging to the order of knowledge or information or value and symbol belonging to the order of recognition or communication between subjects. Chauvet considers them to be the “two poles of all human expression” and even goes so far as to say that “Like our body, our mind needs two legs to walk straight: sign and symbol” (*The Sacraments*, 83).

²¹ Chauvet, *Sacraments*, 71 (emphasis original).

²² Chauvet, *Sacraments*, 73 (emphasis original).

²³ Chauvet, *Sacraments*, 85.

and “agent.”²⁴ Participation in the sacraments reveals Christian identity because those who participate are those who recognize themselves as in Christ. However, the sacraments are also agents of this identity, which is to say that they effect it. Among the reasons for this, Chauvet, thinking specifically of Eucharist, says, “By making these gestures again and again, Christians ‘realize’ little by little what to be Jesus’s disciples really means.”²⁵ This revelation of identity brings about a relation to God and others that is other than it was before the revelation. Thus, Chauvet concludes that the sacraments as symbolic

Give us an understanding of the faith that enables us to see that the sacramental mystery is simultaneously a revealer and an agent of Christian identity.... Furthermore, the symbol, like grace, is outside the value system. For these two reasons, the symbolic route seems to us to supply an approach much more akin to the sacraments than that of instrumentality employed by the Scholastics of the twelfth century, and still dominant in our own day.²⁶

When moving Chauvet’s theology of the sacraments into our discussion of ecology, his concern to overcome various aspects of the Scholastic metaphysical tradition is a worthwhile one, especially as regards the various dualisms common in that tradition. For example, Chauvet’s conception of symbol, with its attention to historical context and action, helps to avoid an emphasis on the spiritual over the physical. Such dualisms are among the most common charges against Christianity for its part in the history of ecological destruction.²⁷ Additionally, the emphasis on the sacraments as symbols through which reality is both mediated and created shows their importance for Christians in understanding the world in which they live. However, this also means that if the sacraments are not revealing to Christians the type of care and attention that the earth requires then their importance as mediation also points to a problem within that mediation.

Yet, this possible problem must be tabled for the time being because it is important first to state that the sacraments are by no means the sole arbiter of Christian identity for Chauvet. Even when thinking back to the contractual understanding of symbol in antiquity, such an understanding operated within the context of a particular culture and legal system. Symbols only function as parts of a larger system or order which is understood by its participants. Without any context, a symbol is empty. In a statement similar to one made earlier, Chauvet says that a (non-empty) symbol evokes “the entire symbolic order to

²⁴ Chauvet, *Sacraments*, 89-91.

²⁵ Chauvet, *Sacraments*, 91.

²⁶ Chauvet, *Sacraments*, 95.

²⁷ For the most influential example of this see Lynn White, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” *Science* 155, no. 3767 (March 1967): 1203-1207.

which it belongs.”²⁸ So, we now turn to that symbolic order to which the sacraments belong, the symbolic order of Christian identity.

Symbolic Order

Symbol only makes sense within a specific embodied symbolic order, and by symbolic order Chauvet means “the meaningful organization of the many elements that compose a properly human existence.”²⁹ This order “precedes every single person since it is within it that one becomes a ‘subject.’”³⁰ So, while Christian identity does require a personal commitment, it is also true that this identity can only be bestowed within the symbolic order of the church, which Chauvet calls “an *ecclesial pattern* common to all Christians.”³¹

One story from Scripture paradigmatic of this ecclesial pattern is the story of the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35).³² In this story, two disciples of Jesus are leaving Jerusalem and heading toward Emmaus on the Sunday of Jesus’s resurrection. To Chauvet, this piece of the story reveals two important points. First, the disciples’ leaving of Jerusalem places the context of the story in the time of the church, which is to say that it is time to go out to “all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Second, the disciples’ leaving of Jerusalem also reveals that they had renounced their expectation for immediate divine deliverance from Jesus. Such renunciation of immediacy is the beginning of faith and marks their consent to the church’s teaching of scripture (or, in this instance, Jesus’s teaching of scripture).

As the story continues, the disciples travel, and Jesus joins them on the way, but they do not recognize him as the risen Christ. In the conversation during the trip, Jesus explicates the scriptures to them concerning the events that had just happened. So, here, one sees the teaching of scripture in order to provide the knowledge of the content of faith made possible by the earlier renunciation of immediacy. Then, when they arrive at Emmaus, the disciples invite Jesus to stay with them, and, as they sit down for dinner, Jesus gives thanks and breaks the bread. For Chauvet, this piece of the story shows an initiative on the part of God. Thus,

What Luke tells us is that each time the church takes the bread, pronounces the blessing, breaks it, and gives it in memory of the Lord Jesus, it is he who does it through the church. The gestures the church

²⁸ Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 115.

²⁹ Chauvet, *Sacraments*, 2.

³⁰ Chauvet, *Sacraments*, 2.

³¹ Chauvet, *Sacraments*, 20 (emphasis original).

³² Chauvet, *Sacraments*, 20-28. The other scriptural examples are the Ethiopian’s baptism (Acts 8:26-40) and the first account of Saul’s conversion (Acts 9:1-20).

makes, the words it pronounces are his gestures and his words. In the fullest sense of the word it is the “sacrament.”³³

Once Jesus gives thanks and breaks the bread the disciples recognize him, but he vanishes once this recognition occurs. In response, they immediately head back to Jerusalem to share the good news that Jesus is alive. To Chauvet, the realization and disappearance of Christ and the reaction of the disciples are important for two reasons. First, the realization *after* the giving of thanks and breaking of bread reveals that faith remains incomplete until it is informed by a sacramental gesture. Second, rather than leaving the disciples hopeless, the disappearance of Christ compels them to action.

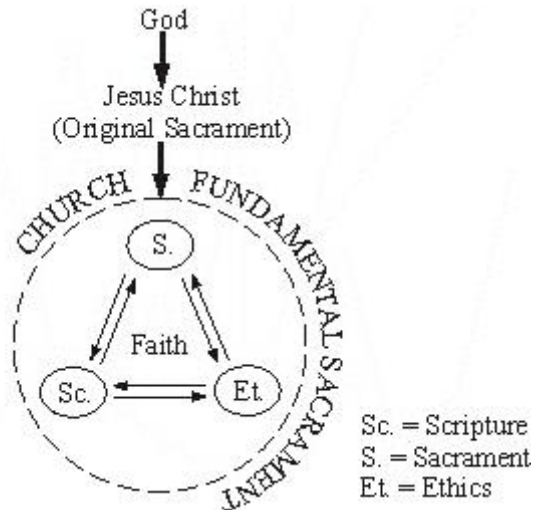
So, from this story in scripture, Chauvet has uncovered a call to convert the desire for immediacy into assent to the mediation of the church. It is assent to the mediation of the church precisely because Christ no longer occupies an immediate space on earth and has instead left the church as his symbolic witness. Chauvet speaks of Christ’s lack of immediacy as “the presence of an absence,” which is what is realized in the sacraments just as it was realized by the disciples when Jesus gave thanks and broke bread. Chauvet says, “To consent to the presence of the absence is to consent to *never being able to leave mediation behind* - mediation of the symbolic order that always-already precedes human beings.”³⁴ So, for Christians today,

It is in the church that faith finds its structure because the church is in charge of keeping alive, in the midst of the world and for its good, the memory of what [Jesus Christ] lived for and why God raised him from the dead: memory through the *Scriptures*, read and interpreted as speaking about him or being his own living word; memory through the *sacraments*, (here the breaking of bread) recognized as being his own salvific gestures; memory through the *ethical* testimony of mutual sharing, lived as an expression of his own service to humankind. We can visualize this structure of Christian identity in the following diagram:³⁵

³³ Chauvet, *Sacraments*, 26.

³⁴ Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 98.

³⁵ Chauvet, *Sacraments*, 28. The diagram, however, is actually the one from *Symbol and Sacrament* (172). I chose this diagram over the one in *The Sacraments* because it is both more complete and easier to understand. Image accessible at <http://www.alastairadversaria.files.wordpress.com/2012/01/chauvet01.jpg>.



In this diagram, we can see the three “poles” of Christian identity: scripture, sacrament, and ethics. The three poles are a “converted” form of the fundamental anthropological structure of knowledge, gratitude, and action.³⁶ Scripture, for Chauvet, is “everything that pertains to the *knowledge* of God’s mystery revealed in Jesus Christ.”³⁷ Sacrament is “everything that pertains to the *thankfulness* which the church expresses to God.”³⁸ And ethics is “all that pertains to *action* in the name of the gospel.”³⁹ Faith lives in the space between the poles and mediates the distance between God and humanity.⁴⁰

The diagram is also read to convey a point covered under a different context earlier, namely that the church precedes the individual. The church is primary for Chauvet because the gospel, by its very nature, is communitarian. Thus, in the diagram, the three poles of Christian identity are only possible within the circle of the church. Being careful here, Chauvet notes that the circle is a dotted line so as not to present it as being completely separated from the outside world. In a similar way, he does not say that salvation is only possible within the church. Rather, he says that, although one can be saved outside the church, one cannot be a Christian outside the church. Highlighting the primacy of the church for Christian identity, Chauvet says “it is not a question of

³⁶ Chauvet, *Sacraments*, 6-7.

³⁷ Chauvet, *Sacraments*, 29. Interestingly, this category is not limited to the Bible but also includes tradition and even theological discourse of both the past and the present.

³⁸ Chauvet, *Sacraments*, 30 (emphasis original). This category is also not limited to the traditional examples. Chauvet includes all the church’s forms of celebration.

³⁹ Chauvet, *Sacraments*, 31.

⁴⁰ Chauvet, *Sacraments*, 40-41.

Christians uniting to form the church, but of the church forming Christians.”⁴¹

Such an understanding of the church and its role in forming Christians includes, Francis would argue, the importance of its role in forming the ecological conscience of its members. The placement of the sacraments in relation to scripture and ethics within the symbolic order of Christian identity is also helpful because it provides a structure that allows for the sacraments to factor into other ecological discussions occurring within Christianity. For example, while those biblical scholars concerned with providing an interpretation of scripture that undermines the pattern of human domination over nature address only one pole of Christian identity, in Chauvet’s understanding such readings of scripture necessarily affect the work of the sacraments and vice versa.⁴² Similarly, Chauvet’s symbolic order provides a structure that expands and makes clearer the connection between Eucharist and ethics that Francis references in paragraph 236 of *Laudato Si’*. Now it is time to explore further this connection between sacrament and ethics, in particular through the concept of symbolic exchange.

Symbolic Exchange

After his discussion of symbolic order, Chauvet proposes symbolic exchange as “a model of how this structure works.”⁴³ To start, like the discussion of language and symbol, reality (even the “self”) is not experienced by humans immediately; it is mediated bodily.⁴⁴ In a similar manner to the way in which Chauvet presented symbol as a means for overcoming the dualities of metaphysics, his understanding of humanity seeks to overcome the “inner” and “outer” distinction. He does so by endorsing the Nietzschean claim, “Body am I, entirely and completely, nothing besides.”⁴⁵ Chauvet even points to the importance of the grammatical construction of this statement to emphasize further that there is no “I” grammatically *or logically* prior to the body. “The human,” says Chauvet, “does not have a body, but is body.”⁴⁶ Using these ideas, Chauvet anthropologically constructs human identity as an “I-body” in which the human “I” receives itself and all other reality as mediated through the body.

⁴¹ Chauvet, *Sacraments*, 31.

⁴² One example of the biblical work being done in this regard is Ellen Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁴³ Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 190.

⁴⁴ Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 146-147. It is also interesting to note that Chauvet even speaks of body as “arch-symbol” (151).

⁴⁵ Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 149.

⁴⁶ Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 149.

Also like symbol, there is attention given to the I-body's context within an already-existent order. Referring to the human body, Chauvet says, "This unique body is 'speaking' only because it is already spoken by a culture, because it is the recipient of a tradition, and is tightly bonded with a world."⁴⁷ Thus, the human "I-body" is given both its content and context by the "triple body" of culture, tradition, and nature in a manner similar to the way in which the church provides a Christian with a context that gives meaning to the three poles of Christian identity: scripture, sacrament, and ethics. And, given the primacy of the body for humans, the materiality of the sacraments is significant.

Picking up on the earlier discussion of sign and symbol, Chauvet adopts the work of Marcel Mauss on gift by distinguishing *market exchange* (sign) from *symbolic exchange* (symbol).⁴⁸ Recall that the logic of sign pertains to value, while symbol operates outside the value system. So then, "market exchange and symbolic exchange depend upon two different principles."⁴⁹ In the market exchange an object is given from one person to another, and then the initial recipient responds with a counter gift.

In the logic of symbolic exchange, "the important thing is less what one gives or receives than the very fact of exchanging, and thus, through the objects exchanged, to be recognized as a subject, as a full member of the group."⁵⁰ However, just as with sign and symbol, Chauvet is not saying that one model of exchange replaces the other. The two types of exchange make up the "two poles" of all exchanges. Within our society, the dominant rule of the market is value, so symbolic exchange only appears on the margins. Yet, there do exist "traditional societies" in which the primary system of exchange is symbolic.⁵¹ In such societies, symbolic exchange is used at every level of the social hierarchy, applies to all domains, including consumer goods, and concerns the dealings of individuals and groups, both within the community and outside it.⁵² Chauvet says,

By simplifying a little, one can describe the logic that rules symbolic exchange as follows: subject A having gathered coconuts, donates the harvest to subject B who, having made some pottery containers, gives them to subject C who at the end of a day spent fishing gives the fish to subject D, and so on. Neither A nor B nor C nor D... calculate "for

⁴⁷ Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 149-150.

⁴⁸ Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 100 ff.

⁴⁹ Chauvet, *Sacraments*, 119.

⁵⁰ Chauvet, *Sacraments*, 119.

⁵¹ Chauvet, *Sacraments*, 117. Chauvet is careful to note that "traditional" is not meant in any pejorative sense. Rather, it is simply in contrast to the technical and scientific nature of Western society.

⁵² Chauvet, *Sacraments*, 117-118.

how much” they have harvested or fabricated goods and “how much” they have a right to in exchange.⁵³

It is in such giving without counting that the notion of “gift” most clearly becomes visible. Symbolic exchange operates under a logic of gratuitousness. But, Chauvet says, “We must immediately add that it is a “necessary gratuitousness” or an “obligatory gift.”⁵⁴ The economic system would be short-circuited by a refusal to either give or receive.

The theological pertinence of such a model of exchange is manifold. Chauvet finds in this model an approach that is “relatively *akin to grace* since in both cases we are beyond value.”⁵⁵ Working with this connection, Chauvet is able to show that just as the gift owes nothing to the return gift, so too God’s grace is not something due to humans. “Grace comes from God’s pure initiative” and “in the sacraments, the position of gift is occupied by God’s gratuitous action.”⁵⁶ If one receives God’s grace *as grace*, then the return-gift is the obligatory response. If one receives grace but does not respond with a return-gift, that person has removed herself from the exchange by making grace an object or value to be acquired.

The symbolic exchange model is particularly helpful for showing how the relation between sacrament and ethics function within the symbolic order of Christian identity. Chauvet says,

Every gift obligates; there is no reception of anything *as gift* which does not require some return-gift.... Therefore, theologically, grace requires not only this initial gratuitousness on which everything else is depends but also the *graciousness of the whole circuit*, and especially of the return-gift. This graciousness qualifies the return-gift as beyond-price, without calculation – in short, as a response of love. *Even the return-gift of our human response thus belongs to the theologically Christian concept of “grace.”*⁵⁷

Chauvet here again emphasizes the obligatory response to the reception of grace, and, further, graciousness is to characterize the obligatory response. It is for this reason that the response is thought of in terms of love, which like grace, is outside the system of value. Grace is not an object to be received; it is a task to be enacted. Again, if the gift does not obligate the recipient to respond in kind then the issue is not the graciousness of the initial gift but the perversion of the gift by the recipient such that its grace is not received *as grace* but as a task. The reception of the sacrament and its connection to ethics depends

⁵³ Chauvet, *Sacraments*, 118

⁵⁴ Chauvet, *Sacraments*, 118.

⁵⁵ Chauvet, *Sacraments*, 123 (emphasis original).

⁵⁶ Chauvet, *Sacraments*, 123.

⁵⁷ Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 108-109 (emphasis original).

not only on the “validity” of the sacrament, which is guaranteed by God, but also the “fecundity” of the believing subject.⁵⁸ So, ethics for Chauvet functions as a means by which “Christians are called to ‘veri-fy,’ that is, ‘make true’ what they have celebrated and received in the sacraments.”⁵⁹ Thus, Chauvet can say that “without ethics, sacramental practice is bound to become ossified and to verge on magic,” and “without the liturgy, ethics can be most generous but is in danger of losing its Christian identity of response to the prior commitment of God.”⁶⁰

This call to “veri-fy” what is celebrated and received in the sacraments provides a clear connection between the ecological issues raised at the start of this essay and the practice of Eucharist. Chauvet’s theological anthropology and understanding of symbolic exchange between God and humanity again emphasize the importance of the concrete by refusing the separation of self from the bodily and symbol from the symbolic order. Thinking ecologically, such an emphasis could be used to give prominence to the care for the physical world as the place where such bodies must live. The notion of symbolic exchange is also potentially useful for issues of ecology, since a hallmark of this kind of exchange is a move away from the market logic of value. Humans should think of nature as a gift from God in which they respond with love rather than thinking of nature simply as a resource to be acquired and used.

QUESTIONS OF ECOLOGY – EVALUATING FRANCIS AND CHAUVET

So, the most relevant aspects of the theology of Louis-Marie Chauvet having been covered and some of the helpful connections briefly noted, it is now time to evaluate where Chauvet’s theology falls short in response to the questions raised in the first part of the essay. I begin by specifically considering the questions raised by *Laudato Si’* and then move on to a story about of the commodification of Eucharistic bread, a story that reveals a set of questions that neither *Laudato Si’* nor Chauvet’s theology raises on its own. A synthesis of Francis and Chauvet, however, can lead to a vision for Eucharist that attempts to keep in view all such questions, a vision I call an “integral Eucharist.”

Laudato Si’

Considering Chauvet’s theology alongside the vision of *Laudato Si’* helps further to illumine both the usefulness and the limitation of his theology for addressing ecological concerns. On the one hand, Chauvet provides an understanding of the sacraments that bolsters

⁵⁸ Chauvet, *Sacraments*, 124.

⁵⁹ Chauvet, *Sacraments*, 41.

⁶⁰ Chauvet, *Sacraments*, 65.

some of the underdeveloped claims Francis makes regarding the Eucharist, such as its ethical import. On the other hand, some of the questions that *Laudato Si'* raises with regard to ecology point to weaknesses within Chauvet's theology of the sacraments, such as the limited social focus of ethics.

The primary reason that Chauvet's theology would bolster Francis's claims about Eucharist is because of the clear connection between the sacrament and ethics in both the symbolic order and symbolic exchange. In paragraph 236, Francis says, "Grace, which tends to manifest itself tangibly, found unsurpassable expression when God himself became man and gave himself as food for his creatures." As has just been shown, Chauvet would certainly agree that grace tends to manifest itself tangibly, and would also add that such tangibility does not end with the reception of the sacrament but extends to the return-gift of love in response. In a similar manner, Francis's description of Eucharist as an "overflowing core of love" can be explicated in Chauvet's theology to further connect the gift of the sacrament and the ethical response of the recipient as a consequence of the overflow of the initial act of grace on God's part. The clear connection between Eucharist and ethical response exhibited by these aspects of Chauvet's theology help to give much more weight to the concluding statement of paragraph 236: "Thus, the Eucharist is also a source of light and motivation for our concerns for the environment, directing us to be stewards of all creation."

While Chauvet's theology helps to bolster the connection that Francis makes between Eucharist and ecological concerns, there is no such concern for issues of ecology in Chauvet's own conception of the sacraments *or in his conception of ethics*. For Chauvet, ethics is socially focused and appears to be limited to human relationships. Although he is careful to avoid an individualistic conception of ethics by emphasizing communal action and sharing, and although he explicitly states, "ethics does not extend just to interpersonal relationships," his understanding of ethics is limited to acts in relation to humanity.⁶¹ Recall that in his explanation of the symbolic order, Chauvet described the "ethical" as "an expression of [Jesus's] own service to *human-kind*."⁶² Elsewhere, he also describes the ethical dimension of Christian identity as "living-in-grace between brothers and sisters."⁶³ Additionally, Chauvet recognizes Eucharist, like all sacraments, as a symbol. Rather than being an instrument, a symbol is an action between

⁶¹ Chauvet, *Sacraments*, 31.

⁶² Chauvet, *Sacraments*, 28 (emphasis added).

⁶³ Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 278. It should be said that there is no indication here that Chauvet has in mind a broader understanding of "brothers and sisters" to include the rest of creation like that found in St. Francis of Assisi.

subjects, so this understanding could be read to imply that the symbolic itself is limited to the sociality of human relationships. While helpful in bolstering the connection between Eucharist and ethics at the end of paragraph 236 in *Laudato Si'*, Chauvet's understanding of the ethical task is not expansive enough to provide a clear response to the ethical issues raised as a result of the integral ecology that is at the heart of the encyclical letter.

Still, there are further challenges that neither Francis nor Chauvet seem entirely competent to address. These problems include "shading" and "distancing," which often go hand-in-hand with the expansion of markets and their commodities. Shading is the obscuring of costs, and distancing is the separation of the decisions of production and consumption, "both of which impede ecological and social feedback and create cognitive, institutional, and ethical lags between initial benefits and eventual full costs."⁶⁴ Similarly hidden from view are a number of value judgments built into the technological systems which are part of everyday life in much of contemporary Western society.⁶⁵ One such example that directly impacts Northern Appalachia would be the use of electric lighting. Though very few people would agree that my ability to read and write for this essay late in the evening is more important than the tops of mountains in Appalachia, that decision is already built into my decision to turn the lights on and plug my computer into the outlet anytime I choose.⁶⁶ Another example, one directly related to our discussion of the connection between Eucharist and ethical action, is the story of the long journey that Cavanaugh Company Eucharistic breads make to tens of thousands of churches across in the world.

"Buying the Body of Christ"

In 2012, the online magazine *Killing the Buddha* posted a feature story by Rowan Moore Gerety about the arrival of the "Communion wafer" into the capitalist marketplace.⁶⁷ This arrival is situated within the story of the Cavanaugh Company, which was founded in 1943 and "now makes 80 percent of the 'altar breads' consumed in the US."⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Thomas Princen, "The Shading and Distancing of Commerce: When Internalization is not Enough," *Ecological Economics* 20 (1999): 235.

⁶⁵ As Francis says in *Laudato Si'*, "We have to accept that technological products are not neutral, for they create a framework which ends up conditioning lifestyles and shaping social possibilities along the lines dictated by the interests of certain powerful groups. Decisions which may seem purely instrumental are in reality decisions about the kind of society we want to build" (no. 107).

⁶⁶ I must thank Dr. Vincent Miller for helping me to see the value judgments built into such systems.

⁶⁷ Rowan Moore Gerety, "Buying the Body of Christ," *Killing the Buddha*, <http://www.killingthebuddha.com/mag/dogma/buying-the-body-of-christ/>.

⁶⁸ Gerety, "Buying the Body of Christ."

According to the company's website, the Cavanaugh Company was formed at the request of local priests in Greenville, Rhode Island.⁶⁹ The priests showed John Cavanaugh, an inventor, the antiquated machines that the parish nuns were using to make the bread. To meet the needs of these nuns, Cavanaugh converted "waffle irons, humidifiers, mixers and cutters into tools for the baking and cutting of the unleavened Communion offering."⁷⁰ So, the company initially started as an equipment supplier for convents devoted to the making of Eucharistic bread.

However, a convergence of historical events led to a shift in the focus of the company. According to Gerety, the first historical event was the baby boom following the Second World War, which resulted in growing congregations.⁷¹ The second was an aging and declining membership at many of the convents making the bread for these growing congregations.⁷² The combined result of growing congregations and shrinking convents was that a number of convents "no longer wanted machinery; they wanted to buy the bread itself."⁷³ Thus, the Cavanaugh Company began to produce the bread, and the convents became distribution centers. In the 1960s, another historical event "really changed everything" for the company: the Second Vatican Council.⁷⁴ One of the changes to come out of the Council was a desire in many Catholic churches for a thicker, more bread-like Eucharistic wafer.⁷⁵ This change resulted in technological advances to production

⁶⁹ Cavanaugh Company, "About Us," <http://www.cavanaghco.com/about.html>.

⁷⁰ Cavanaugh Company, "About Us."

⁷¹ Gerety, "Buying the Body of Christ." It is important to note that this factor is not meant to imply that the Catholic Church grew in great disproportion to the rest of the population. While it may be true that in the years and decades immediately following WWII the church grew numerically, it is more difficult, given demographic complexities as well as the intricacies of sociological findings, to claim that the percentage of the population self-reporting as Catholic and those regularly attending Catholic churches reached a sustained or unprecedented number. See Claude S. Fischer and Michael Hout, *Century of Difference: How America Changed in the Last One Hundred Years* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2006), chapter 8, especially 193-6, 204-5, and 344 n.55-56; for more recent data placing the Catholic Church within general trends in American religion from 1972- 2008 see Mark Chaves, *American Religion: Contemporary Trends* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2011).

⁷² For documentation of this decline and differing explanations for it, see Helen Rose Ebaugh, "The Growth and Decline of Catholic Religious Orders of Women Worldwide: The Impact of Women's Opportunity Structures," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 32, no. 1 (March 1993): 68-75, and Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, "Catholic Religious Vocations: Decline and Revival," *Review of Religious Research* 42, no. 2 (December 2000): 125-145.

⁷³ Gerety, "Buying the Body of Christ."

⁷⁴ Cavanaugh Company, "About Us."

⁷⁵ See Gerety, "Buying the Body of Christ," and General Instruction of the Roman Missal, chapter VI, part I, para. 321. Also of significance in this regard was the change from the priest administering the bread directly to the recipient to handing it to him or her.

that allowed Cavanaugh to meet the new desires of its clients. Gerety reports that another change following the Council was a decrease in the Protestant aversion to weekly Communion, which led to the new establishment of Episcopalian, Lutheran, and Southern Baptist customers.⁷⁶ The new production capabilities that made it possible to meet the new desires of Catholic congregations also allowed for the Cavanaugh Company to tailor production to meet the design specifications of these Protestant denominations.

The result of this convergence of historical factors was rapid company growth and expansion to the extent that today the company can “produce rolls of 100 breads per second.”⁷⁷ The wheat used to make the bread has long outgrown what could be supplied locally, so shipments between 42,000 and 45,000 pounds are brought in every three weeks from Archer Daniels Midland, which, as “one of the biggest corporations in agribusiness,” has multiple operations throughout Northern Appalachia but also numerous accusations of environmental and human rights violations.⁷⁸

In addition to these changes made to the sourcing of the wheat in order to meet the growing needs of its clients after the liturgical changes of Vatican II, the Cavanaugh Company has also continued to grow its design technology and now has a patent-protected process which creates a sealed edge on their wafers in order to prevent crumbling.⁷⁹ As already mentioned, the company also has a website and 1-800 phone number to meet the continued needs of its ever-expanding customer base, which now includes international clients. In the words of Gerety, the Cavanaugh Company has helped to transform Eucharistic wafers from “a good, or a useful object, into a product.” Or, put another way, “what had simply been ‘shoes’ became Nikes and Reeboks.”⁸⁰

If Cavanaugh Company wafers are the Nikes of this account, the Reeboks are wafers made by a convent of the Order of Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration in Clyde, Missouri. The convent is one of the few remaining to produce Eucharistic wafers. Although sub-

⁷⁶ Gerety, “Buying the Body of Christ.”

⁷⁷ Cavanaugh Company, “About Us.”

⁷⁸ Gerety, “Buying the Body of Christ.” The most famous scandal associated with the company is still the lysine price-fixing conspiracy which became the basis of the non-fiction book *The Informant*, by Kurt Eichenwald (New York: Broadway Books, 2000), which was then adapted into a film of the same name in 2009.

⁷⁹ Gerety, “Buying the Body of Christ.”

⁸⁰ Gerety, “Buying the Body of Christ.” However, this analogy should not be taken too far since the companies do not actually brand their wafers with the same type of visibility as shoe companies. In fact, as we will see, the lack of conspicuous branding is crucial to the companies’ success in the altar bread marketplace since such branding could draw attention to the sourcing of the elements rather than allowing these questions to go unasked amid their religious context.

stantially smaller than the Cavanaugh Company, the Sisters still produce over 2 million breads each week.⁸¹ Yet, the sisters consider themselves part of the long Catholic tradition of altar breads being produced by women religious. Where the Cavanaugh factory does not have any religious ornamentation, the Sisters' factory floor is adorned with crosses and religious art. And where the Cavanaugh Company boasts breads "untouched by human hands,"⁸² the Sisters consider their touch an "added value."⁸³ The Sisters also think of the breads as providing a connection with the churches, and they accompany production and packing with prayer.⁸⁴

However, lest the picture appear to be a simplistic case of "bad" versus "good," it is worth pointing out that in sticking with the analogy given above I have decided to cast the Sisters' wafers as "Reeboks," rather than simply as "shoes." The Sisters, even if not the creators of the Eucharistic wafer marketplace, still operate within that marketplace with their particular "brand" of wafers. Like the Cavanaugh Company, they too have technologically advanced wafer production, offer many different product options, provide a website and 1-800 phone number, and serve an international client base. And in the time since Gerety's story, they have also started carrying certain Cavanaugh products that they are unable to produce with their own machines.⁸⁵

The conclusion by Gerety, critical of the altar bread marketplace as a whole, claims that, even though the suppliers have increasingly turned the wafers into "products" or "commodities," churchgoers do not think of the bread in this way. Then, taking his analysis one step further, Gerety seems to lay part of the blame for this lack of awareness at the feet of the Church's sacramental language and liturgical context around the Eucharist. He says,

During church services, wafers are engulfed in enough religious imagery and liturgical context to discourage the realization among congregants that what is now the body of Christ was produced in a factory, bought and sold in a contentious, secular marketplace, and traded hands repeatedly among truck operators and postal workers who had no idea what they were handling.... Maybe the not-yet-realized body of Christ is not so different from that box of "Jesus Is My Homeboy" T-shirts riding next to it.⁸⁶

⁸¹ Altar Breads BSPA, "About Us," http://www.altarbreadsbspa.com/altarbreads/index.php?main_page=page&id=1.

⁸² Cavanaugh Company, "Products," <http://www.cavanaghco.com/products.html>.

⁸³ Gerety, "Buying the Body of Christ."

⁸⁴ Gerety, "Buying the Body of Christ."

⁸⁵ Altar Breads BSPA, "Products," http://www.altarbreadsbspa.com/altarbreads/index.php?main_page=products_all.

⁸⁶ Gerety, "Buying the Body of Christ."

What answers does the church have as resources to address these issues of supply-chain and commodification? Gerety certainly doesn't seem to think that the sacraments themselves will be of much help.

While Chauvet's theology makes an effort to situate symbols within symbolic orders and also highlights the importance of context and culture, such issues do point to the possibility of another critique of his theology: its ability to evaluate the symbols themselves. Speaking of the bread in Eucharist, Chauvet says,

Bread is a *socially* instituted food – even if it no longer has the fundamental place and significance in our societies of abundance it once had when the phrases “to earn one's bread” and “to eat one's bread” were enough to evoke the whole of the production-consumption cycle.⁸⁷

Here we again see an emphasis on the social understanding of the element. But what about when the bread moves from no longer having a fundamental place in society to having a fundamentally different place in society? What happens when the “whole” that the symbol represents is closer to the marketplace than it is to the eschatological vision of the symbolic exchange? As far as I can see, Chauvet has no way to evaluate such possibilities. And such possibilities will not always be easily detectable when we as humans lack the ability to see the invisible symbolic order that is a result of problems like shading and distancing. If the symbols are socially instituted and humans do not have access to the necessary information to assess the impact of those symbols, there seems to be no way to evaluate the symbol until after it has already become obviously corrupted.

Toward an “Integral Eucharist”

One possible step that can be taken toward addressing these questions is the practice of an “integral Eucharist,” by which I mean a conception and practice of Eucharist that provides a clear import for ethics, as we see in Chauvet, while also recognizing the “social” as more than simply human interconnectedness, as we see in *Laudato Si'*. Such a practice of Eucharist would have an attentive eye not only toward the productionist spiritual dimension of Eucharist, which Chauvet earlier lamented, but also toward every material part of Eucharistic practice and highlight the many ways in which each of these parts are connected to *everything*.⁸⁸ The materials used to construct the altar, as

⁸⁷ Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 397 (emphasis original).

⁸⁸ Here I am thinking of the different versions of the mantra “Everything is connected” that Francis says throughout *Laudato Si'* (see nos. 16, 70, 91-92, 117, 120, 137-138, 142, 240).

well as the shape of the construction itself, can call attention toward and encourage an appreciation of the local ecologies of Northern Appalachia.⁸⁹ Likewise, the sourcing and production of the Eucharistic elements, both the bread and the wine, can also highlight the value of the fecundity of the region and the importance of the human hands that are called to protect it. In order for these parts of an “integral Eucharist” to be seen for the interconnectedness that they highlight, however, another important part of this vision is the education of the participants, leading toward the type of “ecological conversion” that Francis speaks of in *Laudato Si’* (nos. 216-221).

While the shape and source of the materials for Eucharist can highlight the connection to the land from which such materials come, I do not think the participants can be expected to arrive at an ecological consciousness and conversion simply as a result of partaking in the sacrament. Just as participants must be taught the significance of the sacrament, so too they must be taught to ask questions of ecology in relation to Eucharistic practice itself. They must be encouraged to judge whether or not the symbols they are using accurately represent the whole of which those symbols are a part. They must be asked to think about the degree to which the sacramental act accurately corresponds to the liturgical words that are a part of it. Then perhaps the “fruit of the earth and work of human hands” will be seen, even by Gerety, as more than just “religious imagery and liturgical context” that discourage critical questions.⁹⁰

CONCLUSION

I began with a brief account of Pope Francis’s vision of integral ecology as presented in his encyclical *Laudato Si’*, particularly in connection with the sacrament of Eucharist. This account of Francis’s link between Eucharist and ethics led to some unanswered questions of ecology in relation to the church’s sacraments. Portions of Louis-Marie Chauvet’s theology were then explicated and evaluated as a potential resource for addressing these questions. It is my contention that Francis’s discussion of Eucharist needs to be further developed in its connection to ethical action and that Chauvet’s discussion of Eucharist is helpful in further developing this connection, but Chauvet needs to expand his understanding of ethical action to include all of creation. Additionally, an account of the arrival of Eucharistic bread into the capitalist marketplace pointed to another set of issues not raised by either Francis or Chauvet. Since it is not enough merely to perform an

⁸⁹ See, for example, the Priest Field Pastoral Center in Kearneysville, WV, discussed by Lucas Briola, “Sustainable Communities and Eucharistic Communities,” *Journal of Moral Theology*, Vol. 6, Special Issue 1 (2017): 22-33.

⁹⁰ Gerety, “Buying the Body of Christ.”

exercise in evaluation without then seeking to salvage the positive elements and exploring ways to fortify the weak aspects, I proposed a synthesis of *Laudato Si'* and Chauvet, a vision I called an “integral Eucharist.” In light of this vision and the important role of education within it, the story of Eucharistic bread production can be transformed from a secondary critique within an academic paper into an important, educative story that fosters the kinds of questions among church members that are necessary for an “integral Eucharist.” It is then up to each particular church to find ways to address those ecological questions for its own locale in a manner that highlights rather than obscures the sacramental connection to the land on which the church lives. It is my hope that rather than having church members who think it is important to work, grow, and buy responsibly and locally but fail to ask questions about such issues in relation to the sacraments, we will have members who think it is important to work, grow, and buy responsibly and locally because that is what they have been shown at the table of the Lord. **M**