

# THE EUCHARIST AS ACCOMPLISHED TRIAD

*Phenomenology of the Gift and the Mahoukou Law*

*In Dialogue with Jean-Luc Marion, Paul, and the Eucharistic Tradition*

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## Prelude — The Breaking of Bread as Philosophical Question

“This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” — 1 Corinthians 11:24

The gesture of breaking bread is one of the most repeated gestures in human history. For two thousand years, in thousands of languages and across infinitely diverse cultures, Christian communities have repeated this gesture and spoken these words. Few human gestures carry such continuity, such universality, such accumulated density of meaning. And yet the philosophical question this gesture poses remains open — not because theologians have failed to answer it, but because it always exceeds what any given answer can say.

This question is the following: what takes place, structurally, in the Eucharist? Not what it means — liturgies, catechisms and great theological summae have addressed this with remarkable richness. But *what is the phenomenological structure of what occurs within it* — the exchange between the one who gives and those who receive, the transformation this exchange operates, and what that transformation in turn produces in the community and in the world? These are the questions the Mahoukou Law enables us to approach with a new philosophical precision.

The thesis this text defends may be formulated thus: the Eucharist is the C·R·R triad in its most accomplished and most open form. It is *accomplished* because it articulates the three moments of the triad — the divine Call in the kenotic gift of Christ, the communal Response in faith and proclamation, the transforming Resonance in the constitution of the ecclesial body — with a coherence and depth that few other human or institutional

realities attain. It is *open* because it never closes upon itself: each eucharistic celebration is a triad that opens onto a new Call toward the world, the absent, future generations, and the eschatological fullness.

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## I. Marion and the Limit of the Phenomenology of the Gift

### A. Marion's Irreplaceable Contribution

Jean-Luc Marion is the philosopher who has most rigorously thought the gift outside the logic of exchange. In his phenomenological trilogy — *God Without Being* (1982), *Being Given* (1997), *In Excess* (2001) — he develops a phenomenology of the *saturated phenomenon*: a phenomenon whose intuition exceeds all concept, which overflows all intentionality, which can only be received in the posture of *the gifted* — one who allows themselves to be given to, rather than one who constitutes its object from a prior intention.

For Marion, the Eucharist is the saturated phenomenon par excellence — and this claim is philosophically decisive. In *God Without Being*, he analyses eucharistic presence as a presence that does not belong to onto-theology. Christ in the Eucharist does not give himself according to the modality of an objective, locatable, gaze-masterable presence — he gives himself according to the modality of the pure gift, which exceeds all intention of return, all reciprocity, all economy of exchange. This contribution is philosophically liberating: it frees eucharistic theology from the metaphysical captivity into which certain formulations of transubstantiation had locked it.

Marion's distinction between *idol-presence* — presence that allows itself to be mastered by the gaze — and *icon-presence* — presence that regards the worshipper from an infinite depth and traverses them — is particularly fruitful for thinking the Eucharist. Eucharistic presence is not a presence the worshipper constitutes by their intention: it is a presence that precedes, traverses and exceeds them. This is the very structure of the Call in the Mahoukou Law: it comes from elsewhere, it precedes the Respondent, it infinitely surpasses them.

### B. The Structural Limit: the Gift Without Resonance

Yet Marion's phenomenology of the gift runs up against a precise limit in the eucharistic context, which the Mahoukou Law enables us to identify. It thinks the Call admirably —

the pure gift, saturation, the overflowing of intuition over all concept. It partially thinks the Response — the posture of the gifted, the reception that surrenders to the gift. But it does not thematise Resonance: what happens in the community that receives the eucharistic gift? How does this reception transform it in its very structure? And how does this transformation become in turn a new Call addressed to the world and to history?

This limit lies in the dyadic structure inherent to Marion's framework: donor / gifted, Call / saturation. This dyad is philosophically powerful, but it cannot account for what Paul describes in his first letter to the Corinthians — the communal and constitutive dimension of the Eucharist. For Paul, the Eucharist is not merely the individual reception of a saturating gift: it is the constitution of a body, entry into a communal Resonance, the transformation of those who receive it into what they receive. It is precisely this third moment — eucharistic Resonance — that the Mahoukou Law comes to thematise where Marion stops.

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## II. The Foundational Pauline Text — The Immanent Triad

### A. *The Formula of Reception and Transmission*

The foundational Pauline text for eucharistic theology is 1 Cor 11:23-26. Paul introduces it with a formula that deserves precise phenomenological attention: "*I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you*" (v.23). This formula — *paralambanein / paradidōmi*, to receive / to transmit — describes a structure of the Call: Paul has received a Call that absolutely precedes him, coming from the Lord and not from his own initiative, and his vocation is to become its mediator — to relay it to other Respondents without deforming or appropriating it.

The words of institution — "*This is my body, which is given for you*" (v.24) — have the phenomenological structure of the Call in its most radical form. They are performative utterances in the Austinian sense: they accomplish what they say. They do not describe a gift: they operate a gift. The formula "*Do this in remembrance of me*" is the injunction by which the eucharistic Call perpetuates itself through time. The Greek *anamnēsis* designates far more than a subjective memorial operation: it is the active re-presentation of a past event — its actualisation in a new present, such that this past becomes present not as memory but as operative reality.

### **B. The Eucharistic Response: Faith, Body and Amen**

Paul continues: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (v.26). The Response is not only interior — it is proclamation, *katangellein*: to announce publicly, to bring to the knowledge of all. The eucharistic Response has a double dimension: interior (the reception of the gift, the act of faith) and exterior (testimony, announcement).

The Latin tradition has preserved a liturgical formula that admirably expresses this structure. When the priest says "The Body of Christ", the worshipper responds "Amen". Augustine of Hippo formulated the depth of this *Amen* with remarkable precision in Sermon 272: "If you are the body of Christ and his members, it is your mystery that is placed on the Lord's table, it is your mystery that you receive. You answer Amen to what you are, and in answering you make your commitment." The eucharistic Response is not intellectual assent to a theological proposition — it is the commitment of the whole person in what it receives.

### **C. The Communal Resonance: Constitution of the Body**

It is in 1 Cor 10:16-17 that Paul formulates eucharistic Resonance with greatest clarity: "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." The Pauline logic is of remarkable density. The verb *koinōnia* — translated as *communion* or *participation* — designates a sharing that engages the whole being in a common reality. Those who share the same bread are transformed — through the Resonance of the shared gesture — into members of one body. This transformation is real, ontological, not metaphorical. Eucharistic Resonance is constitutive: it produces something that did not exist before — the living unity of the ecclesial body.

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## **III. The Eucharistic Call — The Kenotic Veiled Presence**

### **A. The Four Properties of the Eucharistic Call**

The eucharistic Call possesses the four constitutive properties of every authentic Call according to the Mahoukou Law, in the specific form that the theological tradition has designated as *veiled Real Presence*.

Its **constitutive alterity** is maximal. The eucharistic Christ is radically other than what the senses perceive. Bread and wine retain their sensory appearances — their colour, taste,

texture, weight. And yet an absolute alterity gives itself under these appearances. This alterity is veiled — not to deceive, but to create the conditions in which the Response can be free. A Call that imposes itself through sensory evidence leaves no space for a Response that comes from the Respondent's true self. Its **initiating asymmetry** is constitutive: the Eucharist always begins with divine initiative — *"I received from the Lord"* (Paul). Its **immanent normativity** is underscored by Paul with significant severity: *"Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty"* (1 Cor 11:27). Its **irreplaceable singularity** manifests in the double structure of the Eucharist: each celebration is unique — this community, this moment — and at the same time it is identical to the gesture accomplished at the Last Supper and repeated for two thousand years.

#### ***B. Kenosis as the Structure of the Call***

The structure of the eucharistic Call is kenotic in the precise sense Paul gives this term in Phil 2:6-11 — the hymnic text on the self-emptying of Christ. *"Who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant."* This kenosis — this Call that lowers itself, that veils itself, that renounces evidence in order to enter the proximity of the other — is precisely the structure of eucharistic presence. Eucharistic Christ empties himself under the species of bread and wine as incarnate Christ emptied himself into the human condition. In both cases, the same logic of the veiled Call: not the imposition of an irresistible evidence that would constrain the Response, but the withdrawal of evidence that creates the space of free Response.

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## **IV. The Eucharistic Response — Faith, Body and Amen**

### ***A. The Double Structure of Response***

The eucharistic Response is perhaps the most total form of Response that the Christian tradition has developed. It simultaneously engages body, intelligence, will, memory and hope — all dimensions of the human person in a single gesture. And it has, like every authentic Response in the Mahoukou Law, a double dimension: interior and exterior, personal and communal.

The *interior* dimension is the act of faith — the *pistis* in the Pauline sense — by which the believer unites with Christ in the breaking of bread. This is not intellectual adherence to a

theological proposition: it is the commitment of the whole being in a received gift. The exterior dimension is proclamation — *katangellein* (1 Cor 11:26). The eucharistic Response is not enclosed within the believer's interiority — it inscribes itself in the public space of the community and, through it, in that of the world.

### ***B. The Obstructed Response — The Corinthian Scandal***

The immediate context of 1 Cor 11 is instructive: Paul reproaches the Corinthians for celebrating the Eucharist unworthily (vv.17-22). The wealthy eat without waiting for the poor — some go hungry, others are drunk. This situation is not merely an organisational problem — it is an obstruction of the Response in the phenomenological sense of the Mahoukou Law. The Corinthians who eat without waiting give an *obstructed* Response to the eucharistic Call: they receive the bread without receiving the Call it contains. Their Response is mechanical — it accomplishes the gesture without engaging in the reality the gesture signifies and operates. This is precisely what Paul calls "*not discerning the body*" (v.29): failing to recognise that the eucharistic Call is a Call to real *koinōnia* — to effective sharing among members of the same body.

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## **V. Eucharistic Resonance — Constitution, Mission, Eschatology**

### ***A. Constitutive Resonance: Becoming What One Receives***

Eucharistic Resonance is the richest and least adequately thematised moment of the eucharistic triad. It is in 1 Cor 10:16-17 that Paul formulates it with greatest precision. The Pauline logic is of remarkable density: those who share the same bread are transformed — through the Resonance of the shared gesture — into members of one body. This transformation is real and ontological. Eucharistic Resonance is constitutive: it produces something that did not exist before — the living unity of the ecclesial body. Augustine's formula — "*Be what you receive*" — says precisely this constitutive Resonance.

### ***B. Missionary Resonance: Being Sent***

Eucharistic Resonance does not close upon the celebrating community. The Catholic liturgy expresses this through the concluding formula that gave the entire celebration its name: *Ite, missa est* — Go, you are sent. This word *missa* — from which *Mass* derives — is precisely the word of mission. The Eucharist does not end with a closing but with a sending: the Resonance received must become a Call for the world. The C·R·R spiral

reopens: eucharistic Resonance (R2) becomes the new Call (C') that the transformed community addresses to history.

### ***C. Eschatological Resonance: Anticipating the Fullness***

Paul adds a decisive temporal dimension: "*you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes*" (v.26). The Eucharist is an oriented Resonance — it bears toward an accomplishment not yet given. It connects three temporal moments in a unitary structure: the past (the Last Supper, the cross and resurrection), the present (the celebration, communal Response, constitutive Resonance), and the future (the Lord's return, the fullness of the Kingdom). It is thus the triad in its most temporally extended form.

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## **VI. Emmaus and the Eucharist — Phenomenological Revelation**

### ***A. Emmaus as Paradigm of the Eucharistic Structure***

The Emmaus narrative (Luke 24:13-35) is not merely one testimony of the resurrection among others — it is the narrative revelation of the phenomenological structure of the Eucharist. Luke composed this narrative with a clear awareness of its paradigmatic value for the eucharistic practice of the nascent Church. The sequence "*he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them*" (Luke 24:30) is identical, term for term, to the institution sequence (Luke 22:19). This is not a narrative coincidence: it is a deliberate theological signature.

### ***B. The Structural Correspondences***

The correspondences between the two realities are precise and systematic. The veiled Call on the Emmaus road — "*their eyes were held from recognising him*" (Luke 24:16) — and the eucharistic presence *sub specie panis et vini* share the same phenomenological structure: an absolute alterity gives itself under familiar appearances. In both cases, recognition comes not from the senses but from an interior transformation — the opening of eyes at Emmaus, the eucharistic *Amen*. The missionary Resonance is identical: the pilgrims "*rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem*" (v.33); the eucharistic community is sent back into the world by the *Ite, missa est*.

### C. What Emmaus Reveals to Eucharistic Theology

The phenomenological reading of Emmaus reveals to eucharistic theology something it knew intuitively but had not entirely thematised: the *precedence of Resonance over recognition*. At Emmaus, the pilgrims' hearts were burning on the road — Resonance was already at work — before they had recognised who was walking with them. Only after the breaking of bread did they understand: "*Did not our hearts burn within us?*" (v.32). This precedence of Resonance over recognition has a direct implication for eucharistic theology: the transformation operated by the Eucharist does not wait to be fully understood before it begins to act. Resonance precedes its own recognition — and Emmaus reveals this structure.

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### Conclusion — What the Eucharist Reveals to the Philosophy of the Gift

At the conclusion of this text, the central thesis can be formulated in its most concentrated form. The Eucharist is not only a saturated phenomenon in Marion's sense — although it is. It is not only a communal constitution in Paul's sense — although it is. It is the C·R·R triad in its most accomplished and most open form: a kenotic and veiled Call that respects the freedom of Response, a communal Response that commits the whole being to what it receives, and a constitutive, missionary and eschatological Resonance that never closes upon itself but always opens onto a new Call.

What the Eucharist reveals to the philosophy of the gift goes beyond what Marion could anticipate from his own resources. It reveals that the authentic gift is not only saturation — it is also constitution. It not only overflows the receptive capacities of the subject — it transforms the subject by constituting them as a member of a body. And it does not stop at reception — it sends, it orients, it opens onto a future that exceeds the present. The eucharistic gift is the gift that *creates* its respondents by transforming them into what it gives.

In closing, one formula may summarise the whole: the Eucharist is *the triadic civilisation in miniature*. It institutes regularly, in a gesture of twenty minutes, what the Mahoukou Law seeks to promote across all dimensions of human existence: that Calls be heard in their alterity, that Responses be given from the depth of the true self, and that the Resonances that emerge from them be shared, transmitted and oriented toward the accomplishment

of all that creation bears within it in hope — until God is all in all (1 Cor 15:28: *hina ē ho theos panta en pasin*).

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