

Theology & Autism

INSIGHTS FROM THE
DEBATE ABOUT RACE
WITHIN WHITE-
DOMINANT CHURCHES
IN THE USA



Introducing the text



A Body Broken, A Body Betrayed

Race, Memory, and Eucharist
in White-Dominant Churches

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A Body Broken, A Body Betrayed : Race, Memory, and Eucharist in White-Dominant Churches

- Written by Mary McClintock Fulkerson and Marcia Mount Shoop, theologians and Presbyterian ministers.
- It is an attempt to engage with the issues of race & privilege that wound and diminish the life of the church.
- The book uses the Eucharist as a template to both understand how the church can fail to perceive its failings and 'Christ's redemptive capacity' to explore 'new ways of remembering what it means to be the Body of Christ.'

The ownership of space

- ♦ The book was written to engage with the difficulties facing the church when the community could be perceived as being owned by white people.
- ♦ The experience of being in minority seen as both difficult and transitional.



The significance of the function of the Eucharist

- ♦ The Eucharist reproduces social brokenness and also has the potential to transform our brokenness.
- ♦ The Eucharist should challenge the perceived colour blindness within the church.
- ♦ The Eucharist as connection between ‘embodied practice and theological imagination’
- ♦ The re-membling of the Eucharist displays the traumatic memory of those racism within the church.

The Eucharist and trauma

- ♦ Trauma literally means wound.
- ♦ Trauma in our contemporary situation can refer to “collective suffering”
There is a need to reflect on the meaning of collective suffering in relation to theories of trauma.
- ♦ Trauma is characterized by the ‘simultaneity of deeply embodied impact and unassimilated experience’.
- ♦ The avoidance and denial of the trauma of others can lead to preventing ‘the process of collective transition through social trauma’.



Eucharistic re-membering and traumatic memory

- ♦ The Eucharist that evades or ignores traumatic memory reveals a 'dis-membered Body of Christ'.
- ♦ The Eucharist can become 'a space of denial' of bodies reenacting 'a habit of dis-membered community and connection. We gather as a contorted, truncated, dis-membered Body.'
- ♦ 'Re-membering a dis-remembered Body' is a traumatic memory as it remembers violence, rupture and fissure and harm.
- ♦ Traumatic memory is memory that haunts the church as draws attention to wounds afflicting the Body.

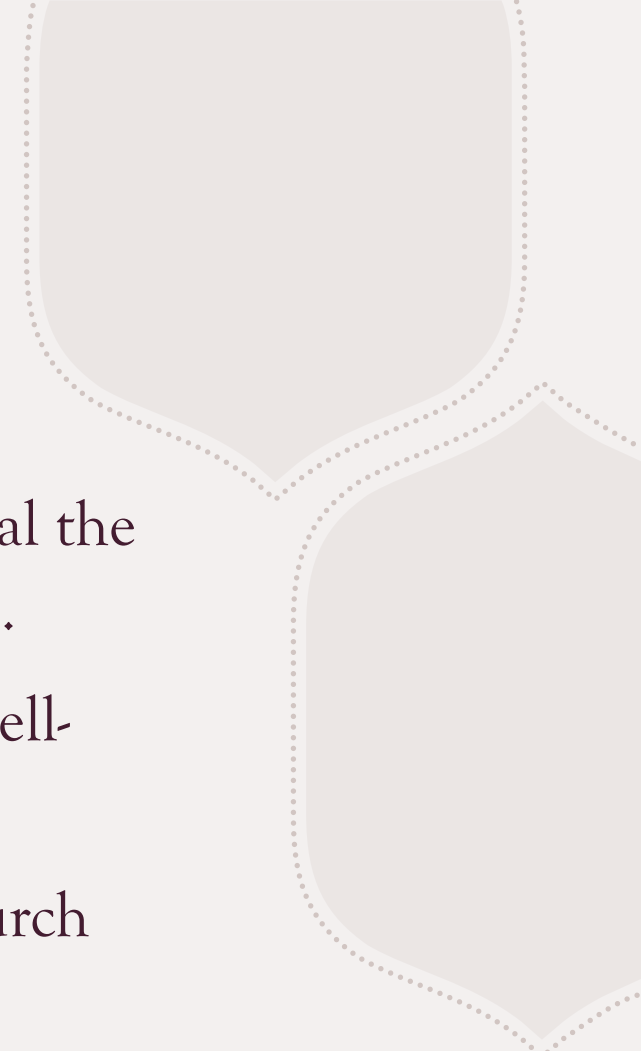
The Eucharist as template

- ♦ The Eucharist should be seen as a template for what the church should be.
- ♦ 'Eucharist is a template through which we can see ourselves and the marks of racialized trauma more clearly.'
- ♦ The Eucharist can be a space for 'new reenactments that integrate traumatic repetition and embodied practices with life-giving possibilities.'
- ♦ Can the Eucharist be a space where we create conditions for theological imagination to deal with colour blindness?



The wound of colour blindness

- ♦ The authors explore the ways that white-dominated church conceal the wounds and avoid dealing the issues and present itself as virtuous.
- ♦ Unacknowledged wounds 'fester beneath the surface of feigned well-being.'
- ♦ The church reaches out to heal the world whilst it ignores the church itself needs healing.
- ♦ The church is oblivious to the true situation.



Transforming memory

- ♦ 'Eucharistic memory is dynamic, embodied and invitational.'
- ♦ Eucharistic memory needs to be transformative and dynamic. The memory of 'Jesus' life, ministry, death and resurrection needs to be understood within the context of the call to address our present context and brokenness.
- ♦ Need for the memory of embodied experience. Memory also needs to be social, public and counter-memory in that it reflects that more than the situations of individuals that it happens within the public domain and it counters the memory of the dominant story.
- ♦



Eucharistic memory and dangerous memory

- ♦ ‘Eucharistic memory can embody and practice “dangerous memory.”’
- ♦ Dangerous memory is an idea associated with Johann Baptist Metz.
- ♦ Dangerous memory remembers Jesus as a “dangerous Christ” who lived in solidarity with ‘those harmed by the powerful.’
- ♦ The “dangerous Christ” is also a liberative one.
- ♦ Dangerous memory is dangerous for those who do not wish to perceive reality.

Dangerous memory and public memory

- ♦ Public memory will often fail to acknowledge the discriminatory and excluding practices that are engaged in.
- ♦ Dangerous memory acts a counter-memory that reveals the discriminatory and excluding practices.
- ♦ Re-membering the dangerous Christ in the context of the Eucharist will bring the dangerous memory within the public memory.



Re-membering Eucharist

- ♦ The book concludes with different ways that the Eucharist can embody a regeneration of community that embraces the realities of community.
- ♦ ‘Eucharist, in its fullest flower, holds together and embodies the tension between deep love and devotion and the pain of betrayal and broken community.’
- ♦ The Eucharist can be the tool to heal the wounds of our broken community.



Questions for reflection

- How relevant are the arguments developed in 'A Body Broken, A Body Betrayed' in understanding how the church engages with issues related to autism?
- What is the most useful idea in this presentation for understanding your own situation?
- Is there anything in the presentation that can be expanded within the context of the church in relation to autism?

