

Investigating Online Communion in the Context of Brewer Christian College's Chapel Program

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Communion is the “ultimate experiential act of worship.”¹ Unfortunately, celebrating the Eucharist appears to be the ultimate obstacle to authentic online fourfold worship. Considering the logistical difficulties and the (non) denominational backdrop of the Brewer Christian College's chapel program, the easiest course of attack is to follow the practice of many denominations that recognize the Symbolic View and eliminate the Eucharist from many, if not all worship services. After all, the majority of the Brewer Christian College faculty, staff, and student body belong to churches where the Eucharist is only celebrated once a quarter, in other terms, they celebrate the Lord's Supper less than 10% of the times that they gather for worship. Further, a few denominations might even deny that the chapel setting is a legitimate opportunity to celebrate communion because it is not specifically a “church.” Another viable, arguably Biblical, option would be to celebrate the reasons and rationale behind the actual physical eating and drinking of the elements in place of the Eucharist feast. Though these are certainly appealing alternatives and would make this a shorter article, for this discussion it is important to actually explore the possibilities and inherent limitations of an online table service.



Before entertaining any options, it is imperative to note that the suggestions made in this article will evoke thought and perhaps emotion. The Eucharist service is the one time in the service where all churches, protestant and Catholic, agree that the believer actually communes with God.² Most denominations consider the elements as “The Holy” or once blessed, to carry with them the actual presence of God. Even in churches where the bread and the wine are considered symbolic expressions, not holy or carriers of the holy, the reverence given to this important action requires that the focus is one of respect and dignity. The following sections will address the inherent strengths and weaknesses of the

¹ Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 162.

² In the Symbolic view, this would simply be one of many times that the believer communes with God during worship.

implementation of each of the key components of the Eucharist service in the context of celebrating corporately through the Internet.

Community

In every denomination, worship begins with the gathering of the saints. Assembling for worship is rooted in the Hebrew concept of “Divine convocation.”³ When God declares that He will “gather His people from all the nations,” Jeremiah recognized Him as “The Great Assembler” (Jer. 23:3; 29:14). In the Old Testament, the prophets characterize God with the metaphor of a shepherd who gathers his sheep and leads them (Ezek. 11:17; 34:13; Mic. 2:12). In the New Testament, Jesus becomes The New Shepherd, the very reason why Christian believers gather and the subject of their worship.⁴ Sunday morning worship acutely illustrates the Hebrew concept of divine convocation. Waking up, getting dressed, gathering the children, and driving to a central location for corporate worship is a common element across all denominational borders. However, this is not a simple, mechanical operation, it is ordained. Driving to church actually fulfills a Divine calling. This understanding, God actually calling each individual to gather, prompted the early church “to think more deliberately about the meaning of assembly and to plan the assembling of the people to hear the Word and celebrate the Eucharist more thoughtfully.”⁵

The culminating event of the churches gathering is the Lord’s Supper. “Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor. 10:17, NASB). As believers gather to celebrate and give thanks, sharing the bread and the wine, they unite in Christ centered community. In every view of the Lord’s Supper community is a central element. Without the presence of community, the idea of one corporate body, unified under the cross, is illegitimate. For successful implementation of the Eucharist to take place online the reality of real, flesh and blood community must exist. So we must answer an important question: Can the corporate body of Christ truly gather via the Internet?

Being alone at home or in the office does not exactly fit the historical description of community. Admittedly, the primary way that we commune is through physical interaction. The invention of previous technologies, the printed page, radio and television moved us in the direction of autonomous community, but failed miserably for the simple fact that they remain one-way communication. Not only did each media fail to build community, research has shown that all three have added to the decline of social interaction in the United States. According to Robert Putnam’s book, “Bowling Alone” Americans attend club meetings 58% less than they did 25 years ago. Families eat together 33% less than they did 25 years ago and compared to 25 years ago; people invite friends over 45%. Putnam’s research shows four primary reasons for the decline in community: mobility, the reduction of leisure time, the movement of women into

³ Robert Webber, *Worship Old and New*, 153.

⁴ Andrew E. Hill, “Biblical Origins of Worship” (lecture at the Institute of Worship Studies in Orange Park Florida, 15 June 2005.)

⁵ Robert Webber, *Worship Old and New*, 153.

the workforce, and the worst “villain” of all... technology.⁶ Interestingly, Putnam’s research predates the Internet. His study ended at the end of 1995, right around the time when the World Wide Web became a reality for the public. According to Joshua Hammerman, a rabbi and journalist, “the Internet craze has actually reversed the trend. More and more people are telling me that the Internet has brought Spirituality into their lives, and at the root of that feeling is the sense of real connection.”⁷ Unlike television and radio, the Internet literally “connects people to one another.”⁸

Online community has become a defining characteristic of the new millennia. According to a January 2007 study released by the Pew Internet and American Life Project “more than half (55%) of all online American youths ages 12-17 use online social networking sites.”⁹ According to the same survey, the popularity of social networking sites has “skyrocketed” over the last five years. The use of these sites is two-fold, to develop existing relationships in pre-existing peer groups and to establish new relationships through online networking.¹⁰ Teens, the largest demographic currently using the social networking sites, use the sites to stay in touch with friends and make plans with their friends. Theologian Tom Beaudoin claims that online communities, like those represented in social networking websites, “can be as bonded as some physical communities and are no less real.”¹¹

The popularity of social networking sites is breathtaking. According to Alexa Internet, Inc., an Internet traffic research website¹², based on the amount of individual users and the average time that they spend there, the social networking websites YouTube.com, MySpace.com, and Orkut.com are the fourth, fifth and ninth most popular websites on the Internet.¹³ The MySpace.com community currently boasts 212,557,346 individual members who have set up personalized accounts, referred to as “my space(s).”¹⁴ Individual users represent their interests and activities, both on and offline, by elaborately customizing individual accounts. The pages include biographical information, pictures and videos, communication tools like instant messaging, billboards and email, and more. According to the MySpace.com website the site “is an online community that lets you meet your friends' friends.” On the site you can, “Create a private

⁶ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000). <<http://www.bowlingalone.com/>> (accessed 23 March 2007).

⁷ Joshua Hammerman, *thelordismyshepherd.com: Seeking God in Cyberspace* (Deerfield Beach, FL: Simcha Press, 2000), 58.

⁸ Jeff Zaleski, *The Soul of Cyberspace: How New Technology Is Changing Our Spiritual Lives* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1997), 244.

⁹ Amanda Lenhart and Mary Madden, *Social Networking Websites and Teens: An Overview* (Washington, D.C.: The Pew Internet and American Life Project, January 7, 2007), 1.

¹⁰ Ibid. “91% of all social networking teens say they use the sites to stay in touch with friends they see frequently, while 82% use the sites to stay in touch with friends they rarely see in person” and “49% use the sites to make new friends.”

¹¹ Tom Beaudoin, *Virtual Faith: The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 88.

¹² <<http://www.Alexa.com>>

¹³ The top ten websites as of March 15, 2007 are 1. Yahoo.com 2. MSN.com 3. Google.com 4. YouTube.com 5. MySpace.com, 6. WindowsLive.com 7. Baidu.com 8. Orkut.com 9. qq.com & 10. Yahoo.co.jp. <<http://www.Alexa.com>> accessed 10 March 2007

¹⁴ As of 28 November 2007. This is a staggering growth of over 177,240,000 members Since I started keeping track of MySpace on 12 September 2005. <<http://www.myspace.com>>

community where you can share photos, journals and interests with your growing network of mutual friends! MySpace is for everyone: friends who want to talk online, single people who want to meet other singles, Matchmakers who want to connect their friends with other friends, families who want to keep in touch--map your Family Tree, business people and co-workers interested in networking, classmates and study partners, and anyone looking for long lost friends!"¹⁵

One of the largest groups on "MySpace.com," with a database-calculated 88,689 members, is the "Hardcore Christians-Living Hardcore."¹⁶ The group's intention is "to be enjoyable for Christians and informational to non-believers."¹⁷ The membership is diverse, representing every age group, nationality and socio-economic situation. Pastors and drug dealers share anecdotes and prayers of encouragement, Senior citizens and teenagers engage in philosophical debates and offer condolences on the loss of loved ones. It is a place where "community is built" and "commitments to Christ" are developed and fostered.¹⁸ "Hard Core Christians Living Hard Core" is a good example of using the communal nature of the Internet for ministry. It has become the recognized norm for younger adults (under 35) to search for significant and meaningful life-long relationships online. Ironically, while the philosophers and theologians are busy debating whether true community can exist on the Internet, millions of people are busily creating "virtual hangouts."¹⁹ According to a 2005 Business Week article "although networks are still in their infancy, experts think they're already creating new forms of social behavior that blur the distinctions between online and real-world interactions. In fact, today's young generation largely ignores the difference. Most adults see the Web as a supplement to their daily lives."²⁰

Online community has significant meaning to the authenticity of Internet worship, especially in the area of online Eucharist. In worship, the believer celebrates and renews the relationship established by God in covenant.²¹ For Internet users who are already investing in online relationships, the idea of ratifying a relationship with The Almighty through the Internet is a reasonable proposal. As teens that have always known the Internet as an important "place" to build relationships become adults, the local church and Para-church ministries, whether web-based or not, will be presented with a powerful opportunity to utilize the World Wide Web to foster relationships born within the four walls of the churches physical location. Even more importantly, as the local church goes online, they expand the scope of the localized congregation enabling individuals to unite with and include other believers who reside around the world, reaffirming the words of the Apostle's creed, "one holy catholic church."²²

¹⁵ <<http://www.myspace.com/misc/about.html>>

¹⁶ As of November 28, 2007. This membership is up from 24,083 on Sept. 12, 2005 when I first started keeping records. "Hardcore Christians Living Hardcore" can be found at <<http://groups.myspace.com/hardcorechristianslivinghardcore/>>

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Andrew Careaga, *eMinistry* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2003), 129.

²⁰ Jessi Hempel and Paula Lehman, The MySpace Generation, Business Week Online, New York, 12 December 2005. <http://www.businessweek.com/print/magazine/content/05_50/b3963001.htm?chan=gl> (accessed 2 April 2007).

²¹ Robert Webber, *Worship Old and New*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 23.

²² Author Unknown, *The Apostle Creed*.

It is obvious that this creed, written long before any denominations existed, does not imply that “we believe” in a brick and mortar building, an autonomous congregation, or a global denomination. One holy catholic church “means the whole body of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, all who anywhere and everywhere are looking to Him for salvation, and are bringing forth the fruits of holiness to His praise and glory.”²³ The concept of one universal church is specifically acknowledged in almost every ancient and modern creed, to deny this concept is to conjointly deny the legitimacy of the historical church. Although human pragmatism tends to limit community to those in immediate physical contact, the Scriptures view community as eternal, extending beyond time and space.²⁴ The church cannot be localized to a congregation, district or denomination. The suppositious implications for online Eucharist are clear. Dr. Gregory Neal, an ordained United Methodist minister explains.

If the Body of Christ is not limited by temporal or spatial limitations, why do we -- in our human dogmatism -- feel the need to limit the Body of Christ and the Means of Grace to just those who can be, physically, a part of a worshipping community? Are Christians only part of the Body of Christ when they are temporally and spatially present at Church? Of course not! Likewise, I believe that the Community is also present with a lone believer who is worshipping Christ and receiving the Means of Grace even by long-distance, over the Internet. Temporal and spatial limitations may limit us, but they do not limit God or the Holy Spirit's ability to convey Grace to a believer.²⁵

Liturgy

The Eucharist service must include prayers of Thanksgiving as well as an opportunity for personal reflection. The actual online implementation of this element can be as simple as posted instructions, but the possibilities are nearly limitless. A couple of examples include a recorded song, reflective in nature, that could be downloaded from the website and listened to by the web-user evoking prayer and repentance. The worship leader may provide an interactive video that offers a corporate prayer of thanksgiving that can be paused after the instruction to take a few moments for personal reflection on the work of Christ at the Cross. Although the choice of implementation can greatly add or decrease from the ease of use and connectivity for the end-user, the content of the implementation requires the greater attention.

As stated earlier, the service of the Eucharist is a four-fold action of taking bread, giving thanks, breaking and pouring, and distributing. In the

²³ The Rev. James Dodds, *Exposition of the Apostles Creed*, <http://www.reformed.org/documents/apostles_creed_dodds.html#ARTICLE_9> (accessed online 27 February 2007).

²⁴ M. Basil Pennington, *The Eucharist: Wine of Faith, Bread of Life* (Liguori, Missouri: Liguori/Triumph Publishing, 2000), 3.

²⁵ Dr. Gregory Neal, *Online Holy Communion: Theological Reflections Regarding The Internet and The Means of Grace*, 2006 <<http://www.revneal.org/Writings/onlinecommunionremarks.html>> (accessed 5 March 2007).

Pentecostal/charismatic tradition, recognizing the symbolic view of the Eucharist, the actual implementation of the four-fold actions varies greatly from congregation to congregation. Without a prescribed liturgy, the careful planning of the Pastor, clergy or lay leader is the key to Biblically and historically aware celebrations. Historically, using the four-fold pattern as a guide, there have been two basic forms for designing the order of the Eucharistic service, the “warrant form” or the “narrative form.”²⁶

In the “warrant form”, the worshipping body “cites the authorization for the conduct of the Supper.”²⁷ Often the leader will read and expound upon First Corinthians 11:23-27. Didactically, the words of Paul in this passage, originally directed to the church of Corinth as a corrective discourse, instruct and guide the church in the proper celebration of the Eucharist. While the leader reads the words of institution, the congregation integrates the instruction of Paul into the service and literally reenacts the Lord’s Supper in a memorial celebration. Based on the survey, the majority of the churches attended by the students of Brewer Christian College adopt this form of liturgy when celebrating the Lord’s Supper.

The second form is the narrative form. In the narrative form, the liturgy expands beyond the words of institution to include the entire story of salvation. The prayers and teachings include “God’s providential work in creation, in the election and exodus of Israel, in sending prophets, in the concrete acts of human service rendered by Jesus, in his meals, in the people whom He encountered, and culminating in the Passion-Easter events.”²⁸ The narrative form strives to present the aggregate of Christ’s salvific story. Though this form is typically associated with the liturgical worship style of The Roman Catholics, Lutherans and Episcopalians, it can be especially meaningful for believers worshipping in non-liturgical churches who ascribe to the Symbolic or Memorial view of the Lord’s Supper. In the narrative form, the memorial can extend beyond remembering the Last Supper and Passion Week, and reminds the church of the entirety of God’s redemptive work.

Leadership

Once again, the role of who can lead the service of the Eucharist varies greatly from denomination to denomination. The Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Episcopal, Presbyterian, United Methodist and other prominent church denominations reserve this significant place of leadership to the clergy. This is also the case in many Pentecostal and charismatic denominations, but it must be noted that in some non-denominational examples, the lines between clergy and lay leaders become blurred in this area. Many non-denominational churches solely ordain clergy from within the congregation, viewing the role of the localized church as a place of training for church leaders. The majority of the students at Brewer Christian College attend churches that allow lay leadership to

²⁶ John Weborg, “Guidelines for Preparing Communion Prayers” in *The Sacred Actions of Christian Worship*, editor Robert E. Webber, vol. 6, Complete Library of Christian Worship. (Nashville: Star Song, 1994), 258.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 258.

lead or assist in the service of the Lord's Supper.²⁹ For Brewer Christian College's chapel program in particular, an ordained minister, our chaplain would officiate the service. The chaplain, Dr. Mary Jane Brewer, holds the academic credentials that most denominations would feel requisite for clergy and is an ordained minister of almost twenty-five years. Although there are certainly church groups that would oppose the simple fact that she is a woman in church leadership, Dr. Mary Jane Brewer fulfills the requirements of the church that she is a member of to lead the celebration of the Lord's Table and leads or assists in leading her local congregation periodically in the remembrance. It is also important to note that faculty, staff and administration of the college consider her a spiritual leader and submit to her pastoral leadership as the chaplain of the school.

The larger question of leading the celebration of the Eucharist requires a brief look at the earliest written documentation of the second century church. Justin Martyr was a philosopher who lived from 110 to 165 A.D. who wrote an early apology of Christianity.³⁰ In his account there is a detailed description of an early New Testament Christian worship service.

And on one day called Sunday there is a meeting in one place of those who live in the cities of in the country. And the memoirs of the apostles (which are called Gospels) or the writings of the prophets are read as long as time permits. When the reader has finished, the president in a discourse urges and invites [us] to the imitation of these noble things.³¹

In Justin Martyr's account, the role of the "president" is that of a teacher of the Word, a leader in the church. The president did not necessarily have the education and training that a scribe or priest would have.³² The president would teach and share from the "experience of being a Christian for most of his life, surviving persecution and imprisonment while sharing the wisdom of living a life in the imitation of Christ."³³ Although his place of authority within the church is unquestionable, and his knowledge of the scriptures is undeniable, the president's educational pedigree is not necessarily the model used by many denominations in ordaining today's seminary credentialed pastors and worship leaders. It appears from Martyr's account that the emphasis of the teaching was practical and time sensitive, addressing the needs of the congregation, while providing the Biblical foundation for individual growth and discipleship. Although ordination is a significant benchmark, it seems that the historical role of "president" may also provide notable criteria for church leadership.

The Elements

Obviously, the distribution of the elements is a major issue when considering the plausibility of celebrating the Eucharist online. There is simply

²⁹ From Online Survey.

³⁰ Philip Schaff, *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus* (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2002), 211.

³¹ Lizette Larson-Miller, "Justin Martyr: The First Apology" in *Twenty Centuries of Christian Worship*, ed Robert E. Webber, vol. 2, *Complete Library of Christian Worship* (Nashville: Star Song, 1994), 149.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

no easy way around this fact. The bread and the wine are more than “thoughts” or “images”; Christ’s decision to use bread and wine as symbols of his body and bread is deliberate.³⁴ To propose the use of virtual bread and virtual wine, suggesting that the believer simply pretend to partake in the elements might bring this conversation back to the concept of alternative or “virtual” thanksgiving, unfortunately I think that this may be more along the lines of a “pretend” thanksgiving instead. When a believer receives the bread and wine they face, either literally or figurative, the very body and blood of Jesus in a tangible way.³⁵ The physical breaking of the bread and the smell and taste of the wine are both “physiological and typological experiences of God’s gracious provision; just as the bread and the wine brings nourishment and refreshment, so also Christ enters our lives to nourish and refresh us.”³⁶ Another might argue for the legitimacy of a single loaf and a single cup, broken by the clergy under the watchful eyes of the congregants via streaming video and then distributed to the online congregants using the USPS, UPS, or FED EX to act as the leader’s hands and feet. Although this is a plausible alternative, I think the whole prospect is a logistical nightmare. What happens to the elements that never make it to the intended participant? What happens when the box is crushed and the elements are wasted? Obviously, both occurrences take place on a weekly basis in churches everywhere. Bread crumbles and falls to the ground, wine spills on clothing. I think that once again, this mode of distribution is reasonable, but I would argue that it is not necessarily the best option, especially for the largely Memorialist body represented at Brewer Christian College. Looking at the example of the early church provides a much easier, Biblically and historically founded solution devoid from all the cheekiness.

Of the few examples of online Eucharistic services that exist, most guide the online worshiper to approach the “table” with bread and wine. Although this is significantly different than the current practice of most contemporary churches which supply the elements, the concept of each individual or family being responsible to bring bread and wine to the Eucharist celebration dates back to the very beginning of the New Testament Church in A.D. 100.³⁷ An online Eucharist service in which the individual gathers bread and wine and brings it to the table would be historically aware and would include each believer, fulfilling the ultimate purpose of involving the whole worship community in the celebration.

The final two “movements” of worship in the Eucharist involve the breaking and distributing of the bread and wine.³⁸ What might have originally simply been a mechanical notion, the practice of breaking the bread has taken on specific meaning for the church. The breaking of the bread signifies both the

³⁴ Harry Blamires, *Words Made Flesh: God Speaks to Us in the Ordinary Things of Life* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1985), 51-55 & 63-67.

³⁵ Dom Robert Le Gall, *Symbols of Catholicism* (New York: Asouline Publishing, 2000), 46.

³⁶ Dr. Gregory Neal, *Online Holy Communion: Theological Reflections Regarding The Internet and The Means of Grace*, 2006 < <http://www.revneal.org/Writings/onlinecommunionremarks.html>> (accessed 5 March 2007).

³⁷ Lizette Larson-Miller, “The Didache (A.D. 100)” in *Twenty Centuries of Christian Worship*, ed. Robert E. Webber, vol. 2, Complete Library of Christian Worship. (Nashville: Star Song, 1994), 146.

³⁸ Peterson, 209-212.

unity of believers and the broken body of Christ. The breaking of bread must take place in community, and for most Christians, in the presence of an ordained clergy. Even in the symbolic view of the Lord's Supper, there is a requirement to separate this loaf of bread and this cup of wine from all other loaves and cups.³⁹ Even though they do not contain the literal body and blood of Jesus, they are sacred symbols during the Eucharistic service. Regardless of viewpoint or denomination, during the Lord's Table, the leader corporately blesses or "consecrates" the bread and wine, setting them apart for God's exclusive purpose.

The epicletical prayer has been a key component of Eucharistic services since the New Testament. In the Eucharist, the leader asks the Holy Spirit to bless the elements, allowing the congregation to "commune" with Christ while partaking in His body and blood, whether symbolic or literal.⁴⁰ The key participant in this blessing, or the Epiclesis, is not the celebrant but the Holy Spirit. The focus of this discussion must not center on the role of the celebrant, but on the nature of the Holy Spirit. Unlike the celebrant, the Holy Spirit has the ability to reside apart from the limitations of time and space. The leader is restricted to a certain location at any specific time, but the Holy Spirit is not. Human beings tend to see life in a linear procession, days attached to days like railway cars. Our birth date attaches to our death by a series of events. Marriage is not a one-day affair, but a long progression of interpersonal interactions. Even something as ordinary as traveling to the gas station involves leaving the house, getting in the car, driving, stopping, fueling, paying, leaving, etc. Dissimilarly, God exists in the "eternal NOW."⁴¹ If we see history as a series of events, God sees them "all piled up in one column."⁴² Putting human limitations upon the Holy Spirit denies the eternal nature of God. As worshippers gather online for the service of the Eucharist, bringing the elements to the celebration, the leader calls upon the Holy Spirit to bless the elements regardless of location or time. To limit the blessing to the close proximity of the leader is to credit him or her with the ability to do the work of the Holy Spirit. Dr. Gregory Neal on his website explains it powerfully:

Human conceptions and limitations of time and space are never an impediment to God's ability or desire to grant divine Grace. Every celebration of the Eucharist, which has ever occurred or will ever occur, has taken place at the exact same moment for God ... in God's eternal "now." Likewise, every celebration of the Eucharist, held anywhere in the universe, occurs at the exact same place for God ... in God's omnipresence.⁴³

³⁹ Zwingli held the elements in the highest respect. Freeman, 60.

⁴⁰ Meeter, 252.

⁴¹ M. Basil Pennington, 3.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Dr. Gregory Neal, *Online Holy Communion: Theological Reflections Regarding The Internet and The Means of Grace*, 2006 < <http://www.revneal.org/Writings/onlinecommunionremarks.html> > (accessed 5 March 2007).

Though receiving the elements in a physical location surrounded by flesh and blood believers is superior in many ways, receiving the elements in an online Eucharist may actually provide a fresh perspective for the believer. As the worshiper holds the elements in hand and unifies with others online in the symbolic act of simultaneously breaking the loaf, perhaps for the first time will the believer be aware of the fullness of the symbolism of the broken body as represented in the crumbling pieces of bread. In the final movement of the Eucharist, the worshiper lifts the bread and wine to his or her mouth and enters into communion with the Lord. Online worship may actually provide a renewed perspective to this ancient ritual. In a corporate setting, the individual may find it difficult to remove themselves from the distractions of the other church members to truly celebrate the communication between Christ and the believer. With the power of the relational Internet, allowing the believer to literally disconnect and reconnect to community in a moment, online worship allows the believer to be with the congregation, yet alone with God.

Concluding Thoughts

Even the briefest overview of church history provides immediate evidence that the Theology and church doctrines surrounding the celebration of the Lord's Supper have continually divided the church. This came to a fever pitch during the reformation. The blood of many men and women was shed to defend the mystery that Calvin rightfully declared beyond understanding. In the light of church history, it would only make sense that the idea of celebrating the Lord's Supper online would cause some division and strife. The key is to allow other believers to have opinions, even theological arguments regarding the practice, yet remain in harmony over the reasons the church corporately celebrates the Eucharist.

It is fair to say that a denominations theological stance on the Eucharist will effect the decision to celebrate online. Churches that view the elements as being the literal body and blood of Jesus would understandably have a harder time with the suggestions that I have made than churches who follow the symbolic or memorial view. Regardless of denomination, by carefully addressing the four key issues of the Eucharist, community, liturgy, leadership and the elements, I feel that the practice of celebrating the Lord's Supper online becomes a realistic prospect. In no way am I implying that the Internet can or should replace the regular physical gathering of the saints, but I do think the Internet offers the church a wonderful opportunity to gather as one and remember the salvific act of Calvary.

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