

Celebrations of the Eucharist in Ecumenical Contexts

A PROPOSAL

Meeting at the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, Switzerland, 12-21 May 1995, Christians from different churches and confessions throughout the world have considered the growing phenomenon of celebrations of the eucharist in ecumenical contexts.

Those gathered together have given thanks to God for the wide influence of the Lima liturgy¹ in many churches and for the tentative further steps which these churches have sometimes taken in the spirit of the Lima liturgy and of the *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* document.² They have noted that celebrations of the eucharist have taken place at international ecumenical gatherings, at regional and local ecumenical events and in small ecumenical communities. They have noted that these celebrations have, in the spirit of the Lima liturgy, often moved beyond one liturgical tradition simply showing its historic or current forms to the assembled Christians, many of whom are from other traditions. Rather, there has emerged a challenging new form of ecumenical prayer arising from a concern to enable the present actual community to pray together, from a theological convergence emerging from many sources, from a continued and shared scholarly exploration of the liturgical heritage of Christians, and from an eagerness to see that heritage celebrated in ways appropriate to the dignity and gifts of specific human cultural contexts throughout the world.

A substantial number of us, liturgists, theologians and pastors, have considered this phenomenon in more detail. Under discipline from the larger group, and in continuing discussion with it, we have felt moved to propose, on our own initiative and responsibility, the following pattern and guidelines to anyone engaged in planning eucharistic worship in an ecumenical context. In making this proposal, we have been helped especially by three classic texts important to the eucharist:

- 1) the account in Luke 24:13-35 of the risen Christ transforming two despairing disciples and sending them on mission by means of his living interpretation of the scriptures and his presence in the breaking of bread;
- 2) the 2nd-century account of Justin Martyr (1 *Apology*, 67) of the shape of the ancient eucharist on Sunday as including gathering, scripture reading, preaching, interceding, setting out the food, giving thanks, eating and drinking, sending to the absent and collecting for the poor;
- 3) the late 2nd-century report of Irenaeus of Lyon concerning the time when, in order to show unity, Anicetus, bishop of Rome, "yielded the thanksgiving" at the eucharistic table in the Roman church to Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 5:24:11-18).

We have also been helped significantly by two of the widespread and growing fruits of the ecumenical movement: the *liturgical* convergence on a common pattern of eucharistic celebration reflected in the worship life of many churches, and the *theological* convergence on the meaning and grace of the eucharist represented by the Eucharist section of *BEM*.³

What follows are suggestions, offered in a spirit of love and prayer, which we

present for consideration by those contemplating the celebration of a eucharist in an ecumenical context. None of these are intended to criticize the liturgies of participating churches or the liturgical traditions of denominations, confessions or communions. They come, rather, as a strong, descriptive proposal in order to urge planners not to forget the spirit of the Lima liturgy: a liturgical celebration recognizable to all, which nonetheless calls us all beyond our own experience to a wider unity.

We have found in the pattern of eucharistic worship we here present, and in our varied celebrations of this pattern, a witness to the historic catholic faith. We have also encountered therein a simple form of celebration which may be carried out in a rich variety of ways, which responds to the needs of the world in the present time, and which is capable of inculturation in many places. This basic pattern (*ordo*) is found on page 35 below. It is consistent with the listing given in *BEM*,⁴ but our presentation seeks to show the inherent simplicity and clarity of the eucharistic service, to reveal its underlying structure, to make plain which parts are essential (and which optional), and to suggest both the movement and flow of the service as a whole, and the dynamic relationships among its parts.

We have also found that these discoveries lead us to important conclusions regarding Christian unity. For example, we are well aware that it is often primarily questions of ministry and authority which prevent Christians from coming together at the table of the Lord. We are well aware of the complexity and sensitivity of the issues involved. And yet we continue to wonder whether the churches, on the basis of the acceptance of this pattern by all participating communions, might be prepared to extend to each other an "interim eucharistic hospitality" (that is, the giving of an invitation for all present at an event to receive communion), at least for major ecumenical gatherings.

But whatever answer might be given to this question, we would ask any group of Christians planning eucharistic worship in an ecumenical context to consider these questions with us:

1. Do you recognize this liturgical pattern as bearing the historic catholic faith which unites your church to the other Christian churches?
2. Do you recognize this liturgical pattern as bearing the world in which we live, as showing forth its conditions plainly, and proclaiming its transformation in Christ?
3. If so, what implications flow from these recognitions?

In order to aid your planning and to give a basis for these questions we share with you the following convictions. They are intended to be read in conjunction with the pattern (*ordo*) for eucharistic worship given on page 35 below.

1. A celebration of the eucharist in an ecumenical context includes a clear service of the word and a clear service of the table.

This event of word and table should be preceded by a holy gathering of the assembly into the grace, love and koinonia of the triune God and followed by an appropriate sending of the assembly in witness and service. In regard to this gathering and sending, see paragraphs 7 and 8 below.

2. The service of the word in such a eucharist includes two clear components: scripture reading from the Old and the New Testaments, and proclamation of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ as the source and ground of our life in God's grace. Readings and preaching together should then lead the assembly to a

response to the word in intercessions for the need of the world and for the unity of the church, confession of the faith, and song.

The confession of the faith should occur, either here, after the sermon, or in preparation for the service of the table, in the original text of the Nicene Creed (Constantinople 381 CE), as that text which expresses the widest measure of doctrinal consensus amongst the churches.

A collection for people in need or in support of an agreed cause may also be an appropriate response at this point, associated with the intercessions, or it may occur at the end of the service of the table.

Biblical texts should be carefully chosen with respect to the occasion and with attention to the various lectionaries represented in the participating churches.

The proclamation of Christ will ordinarily take the form of a prepared sermon. In smaller groups, it may also involve the preacher engaging the assembly in active reflection on the word.

The service of the word may also include other elements which respond to and support these components, for example, meditating on the word in silence, the singing of hymns and contemporary songs, the singing of psalms; the singing of the classic short hymns appropriate to a feast day (*kontakia*) and the hymns or antiphons made up of psalm verses which may accompany a scripture reading (*prokeimena*), and other such liturgical elements of the Eastern traditions; or alleluia verses and sequences and other such liturgical elements of the Western tradition. The exchange of the peace may conclude and seal the intercessions and prepare for the service of the table.

3. The service of the table in such a eucharist includes two clear components: a thanksgiving at table, and the communal eating and drinking of the bread and cup of the thanksgiving, the holy gifts of Jesus Christ's living and active presence. Thanksgiving and communion together should then lead the assembly to mission.

The thanksgiving should include the historic dialogue (*sursum corda*), praise to God for creation and redemption, the words of Christ at the institution of the supper, the explicit memorial (anamnesis) of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the explicit prayer for the coming day of God, expressed in invocation of the Holy Spirit (epiclesis) and commemorations, the "amen" of the entire assembly, and the Lord's prayer. This thanksgiving is best proclaimed with frequent responses from the entire assembly.

The use of a single loaf of bread and a large single cup should be seriously considered.

The collection for those in need may also occur at the end of the service of the table, but it ought not to be omitted nor should it be used for ecclesiastical expenses nor for the costs of the event. It may consist of gifts of food for the hungry.

The service of the table may also include a ceremonial presentation of gifts, an invitation to communion, and the singing of classic or modern communion songs.

4. The entire event of such a eucharist should be musical, with the great structure of the assembly's action unfolded in the culturally diverse song and movement of the churches of the world.

That music — and the space of the liturgy together with its visual arts — should serve the essential flow of the structure of the rite, not obscure it. It should engage the assembly in that flow. For example, great care needs to be exercised in the

choice of such words in hymnody and song as most clearly express the shared catholic faith, the scripture readings of the celebration, their place in the order, the sense of the Sunday or festival, and the unity of the church.

The sharing of our different heritages of music, our creativity, and the exploration of our cultures have made a vital contribution to ecumenical worship over recent years. We have learned that every culture has a rich gift to bring to worship, and that worship may be enhanced by many musical styles and rhythms, chosen with care and sensitivity to their liturgical function.

5. The celebration of such a eucharist involves a participating assembly and many liturgical ministries. Its unity is best served by one person presiding, in order to serve the unity and flow of the whole liturgy and to draw forth the gifts present in the assembly.

A celebration of the eucharist in an ecumenical context should, as far as possible, while respecting ecclesial disciplines, involve the active participation of all the assembly. The planning should involve members, both ordained and lay, of all the traditions represented. It should also involve the liturgical ministry of both lay and ordained Christians in reading, singing and leading song, praying, dancing, serving and gathering.

A single ordained pastor, presbyter or bishop, whose ministry is recognized in a participant church, should preside. "In order to fulfil its mission, the church needs persons who are publicly and continually responsible for pointing to its fundamental dependence on Jesus Christ, and thereby provide, within a multiplicity of gifts, a focus of its unity."⁵ Careful reflection should be given to this leadership. The presider may come from the leadership of a local host church. Ordinarily the presider will greet the assembly, preach, proclaim the thanksgiving and bless the assembly as they are sent. Presiding may sometimes take the form of the presider yielding place to another preacher or to another leader of the eucharistic prayer. "Concelebration", understood as group presidency by ordained ministers from different confessions, raises more ecumenical problems than it solves.

The ministers, lay and ordained, who lead this service could each be clothed in a garment which may be recognized as proclaiming our common baptism into Christ and as representing the entire assembly. Other signs of festivity or service, drawn from the historic Christian vestments or the current cultures of the churches, may mark the principal ministers, especially the presider.

6. In planning such a celebration of the eucharist, consideration should be given to holding the celebration on a Sunday or other Christian festival as a sign of the mystery of the resurrection that unites us.

In many places in the world, the special sense of Sunday needs to be recovered. The Lord's supper belongs first of all to the Lord's day. Furthermore, ecumenism is central, not peripheral, to the life of the churches. This is not intended to preclude the choice of other days when Sunday or festivals are not practicable for a particular ecumenical event.

7. The gathering may include various actions, but it should draw the assembly, bearing in itself the need and longings of the world and the reality of each local place, into the grace and mercy of God.

Such a gathering is based upon our common baptism into the mystery of the

trine God and so into the church. This gathering may include singing the praise of God, confession and forgiveness or some other baptismal remembrance, a call to worship or biblical greeting, a kyrie or litany of entrance, gloria in excelsis or other doxology, and a traditional collect or prayer of entrance. It is not suggested that all of these ways of gathering should be used, nor that more possibilities should be planned for a large event or fewer for a small: but people in each place need to ask how gathering in the grace and mercy of God can take place appropriately *here*, reflecting local cultural customs.

8. *The dismissal may include various actions, but it should send the assembly to serve in love and to bear witness to the freedom of life in Christ, and to the justice, peace and integrity of creation willed by God.*

The dismissal will receive and enact all the ways in which the liturgy has stirred the assembly to action. It may be marked by a post-communion prayer committing the communicants to the mission of Christ, by singing, a blessing on departure, a word of dismissal, the possible sending of the holy communion or other gifts to those who are absent, or the sending of food to the poor.

9. *Participation in the proclaimed word and the prayers of the assembly is participation in Christ. It is also Christ who, in the power of the Spirit, invites all to eat and drink his holy gift.*

Nonetheless, participants in the liturgy who are not able to receive communion at all, or not able to receive one or the other of the holy gifts, should not be shamed or made to feel unwelcome. They should be encouraged to participate as far as they are able, to behold in love and adoration Christ who gives himself to these others of his people, to understand themselves as belonging through baptism to Christ as well, and to pray for the day of fuller Christian unity.

10. *The extensive options listed here ought not obscure the simple order proposed: this liturgy could be celebrated with great simplicity or with extensive local experiment toward an emerging pattern of the future.*

The pattern is quite simple (see the *ordo* on page 35). And, granted a clear word and table structure, local ecumenical groups are encouraged to discover how this great gift of God might be newly and faithfully unfolded. A simple service, however, should not omit the central elements of Christ's gift nor should an elaborate or experimental service obscure them.

11. *As a liturgy is prepared according to these proposals, texts for the principal parts of the eucharist may best be chosen from prayers which have been accorded a wide ecumenical reception.*

In the selection of texts for the liturgy, including the scripture version to be used, careful attention should be given to the use of inclusive language. Different cultures will call for different solutions, but the goal is always to find language which will include as many as possible in full participation in the prayer. Following the interim guidelines for the Canberra assembly of the World Council of Churches,⁶ biblical language and significant traditional formulas should be preserved.

¹ "The Eucharistic Liturgy: Liturgical Expression of Convergence in Faith Achieved in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*", Geneva, WCC, 1983; a reprint of "The Eucharistic Liturgy of Lima", *Ecumenical Perspectives on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Max Thurian, ed., Faith and Order paper

no. 116, Geneva, WCC, 1983, pp.225-46. The Lima liturgy, an unofficial text of the Faith and Order commission, was developed to express in liturgical form the theological convergences reached in the official *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* document.

² Faith and Order paper no. 111, Geneva, WCC, 1982.

³ *Ibid.*, pp.9-17.

⁴ Eucharist, 27, pp.15-16.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Ministry, 8, p.21.

⁶ See Per Harling, ed., *Worshipping Ecumenically: Orders of Service from Global Meetings with Suggestions for Local Use*, Geneva, WCC, 1995, pp.3-4.

The Fundamental Pattern (*Ordo*) of the Eucharistic Service

GATHERING of the assembly into the grace, love and koinonia of the triune God

WORD-SERVICE

Reading of the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments

Proclaiming Jesus Christ crucified and risen as the ground of our hope

(and confessing and singing our faith)

and so *interceding* for all in need and for unity

(sharing the peace to seal our prayers and prepare for the table)

TABLE-SERVICE

Giving thanks over bread and cup

Eating and drinking the holy gifts of Christ's presence

(collecting for all in need)

and so

BEING SENT (DISMISSAL) in mission in the world

The following were members of the group which developed this text:

Rev. Robert Gribben (United)
Rev. Dennis Hughes (Presbyterian)
Fr Brian Jemmot (Anglican)
Pastor Gerd Kerl (United)
Rev. Gordon Lathrop (Lutheran)
Rev. Jaci Maraschin (Anglican)
Mrs Joan Matthews (Baptist)
Rev. Rodney Matthews (Baptist)
Rev. Thomas Best (Disciples of Christ)
Rev. Janet Crawford (Anglican)
Rev. Dagmar Heller (United)

In addition, our general discussion was enriched by Fr Elias Thandikayil (Oriental Orthodox), who was able to be present during many of our sessions.