New Blackfriars

DOI:10.1111/j.1741-2005.2009.01322.x

Eucharistic Celebrations: the Chasm between Idea and Action

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Abstract

The two changes (1, a new rite; and 2. the move to the vernacular) that occurred in the eucharistic liturgy of the Roman Rite have often been seen as simply evolutionary, liturgical variations: this perception suited that time of great change in the liturgy, and has continued among many in that they assume that these changes are somehow optional. However, this change is better seen as a change in paradigm: no longer is the general understanding of the Eucharist based in catechesis or theology that is parallel to the liturgy, but the understanding of the Eucharist is a function of participating linguistically in the actual event of the Eucharist. This paradigm shift needs to be appreciated if we are to discuss the state of eucharistic theology and liturgical celebration today.

Keywords

Eucharist, Vatican II, Vernacular, Participation, Liturgy, Paradigm

It is now more than a generation ago since two distinct but interrelated events in the history of the western eucharistic liturgy. The first was the change in the understanding of the Eucharist that underpinned the actual rite. While widely perceived as simply changes in texts and ritual details, it was in fact a paradigm shift[1] from a liturgy that emphasised the event of the change in bread and wine into presence of Christ to a theology that focused on the action of the whole Christ in offering thanks to the Father. This change in theological perspective set an end to a process that began with the work of Isidore of Seville (d. 630) and, in effect, set a question mark over the writings on the Eucharist of the scholastics, the controversies of

[1] The notion that there is a paradigm shift between the pre-Conciliar rites and those of today (as distinct from models of the relationship being either evolution or reform) is derived from T.S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (second ed., Chicago IL, 1970).

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the Reformation period, and the standard forms of post-Tridentine theology. Given its revolutionary nature it is not surprising that at the time few recognised just what an enormous change was taking place; while at the same time those making the changes were most anxious to assert the continuities rather than breaches with the past. Part of the problem in this revolution, presented as just another 'reform,' was an uneasiness with the notion that in this new perspective there was the implicit assertion that the Latin church might have been theologically off-key in its central ecclesial action for centuries, and as with any corporate body that has to face up to the need for deep surgery to restore its health, such an acknowledgement was, and for many still is, an unwelcome vista. The extent of this theological revolution can be seen in the shift from the word 'Mass' (an action one attends) to 'Eucharist' (an action one takes part in) for the event; the shift from a ill-fitting set of theologies of Sacrifice/Sacrament to that of the celebration of the Paschal Mystery; and in seeing Holy Thursday rather than Corpus Christi as the 'day of the Eucharist.'

The other change – liturgy in the vernacular – seemed straightforward with few theological implications. Since it was the rite, not the language, that was important, this move was perceived as merely an accommodation to the fact that few people had a ready comprehension of Latin. This change was an act of ecclesial 'user-friendliness' by a benign user-friendly council. Therefore, the major concern was/is that the translation be 'accurate' and 'true' to the 'original.' The attitude was that if the translation of the words of the rite is not defective (often causing acrimonious debates over the theological 'weighting' of grammatical propositions) and passably appropriate (aesthetic debates about sacral language), then there was little more to be said about this change. But was this change so free of theological implications? We should first take into account the fact that the very decision that Christians should be able to take part in the Eucharist with that level of comprehension and involvement that linguistic understanding offers was itself a most profound change in the Church's approach to the Eucharist. It implies it is an event that actively involves, at the level of their own everyday understanding, all who celebrate it; and it implies a shift away from the position that it is the action by another, the priest, acting on behalf of the worshippers who reap benefits from his action. The practice of Mass stipends – asking the priest to offer Mass on behalf of X – is an example of the older way of thinking where it is the priest's doing in the *do ut des* transaction that is of direct spiritual benefit to the person who is the object of the intention.[2] Moreover, the vernacular

[2] The fact that this practice is still countenanced by Canon Law (Canons 945–58) shows incoherence between the Council's eucharistic paradigm and that of the legislators. It might be objected that the legislators had to legislate for actual practice and in 1983

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alters the place of the Eucharist in Christian life. It is now envisaged as an activity that all who attend can *engage in* as part of their Christian life, rather than attending an action where it is the act of attending the Eucharistic activity that is part of the Christian life. In the first case, there is an inherent demand to engage, and engage well, in the action; in the latter case living the good Christian life simply involves having 'been to Mass' and there can be no question that the 'success' of the Eucharist as a celebration of the community is in any way related to the quality of an individual's participation. The persistence of older language where a priest 'says Mass' and a layperson 'gets Mass' at once exemplifies the older spirituality, while its persistence shows how little the understanding of Vatican II has penetrated popular Catholic consciousness.

Lack of appreciation of the perceptual depth of these changes (in theological paradigms and in relation to conscious involvement) was, ironically, compounded by those who, welcoming the changes, often presented the earlier period as a time when Catholics (other than the servers) were simply not involved: those 'going to Mass' were passive, whether saying their own prayers or reciting the rosary, and only engaged with the Eucharist when, cued by a bell, a minority may have gone to receive Communion.[3] This approach to welcoming the reforms, which is excellent at pointing out the shortcomings of the previous rite (it is a misnomer to call it the 'Tridentine rite' as there were many similar rites, and they were much older than Trent, but all equally flawed), failed to recognise that people can be deeply and personally involved in activities they do not comprehend through language. Examples of such involvement abound because there is no shortage of rituals (both secular and religious) where the language or ritual is so archaic that only a very small number of people – the ritual experts – understand the linguistic content of the ritual and for

(just after a decade after the new rite's appearance) this practice was still part of Catholic life and piety and therefore had to come within the provisions and regulations of the code. However, the persistence of the practice, itself enabled if not encouraged by its sanction within the Code, represents a subversion of the message of the rite, and the dissonance caused by the unresolved consequence of an earlier theology may (as has happened so often in the past) negate all the fundamental reform intended by the Council.

[3] It is worth recalling that at many Masses no one, other than the priest, actually received Communion. Indeed, given that the distribution of Communion was a separate rite that was used as needed, it was not unusual in a situation where several priests were celebrating severally on different altars in a church for a priest to instruct the server to tell anyone (including the server himself) who was attending 'his Mass' and wanted Communion that he was not going to give Communion to anyone as his Mass would be over in time for them to get Communion from the priest-on-duty saying Mass on the high altar. Those theologians today who are enamoured of the 'beauty' of the unreformed rite or who stress how beneficial it was 'in forming many in holiness' should be given these practical details of the rite – which were not abuses for they were formally sanctioned by law within it – as test case to see if they could explicate, and then be willing to defend, the theology underpinning such praxis.

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whom the ritual's own expressions contribute to their understandings. So what does a ritual mean for those who *cannot* engage in it linguistically? It is usually a mixture of two wholly distinct elements. First, what they perceive to be the rite's significance by inference from the locale, the choreography, the tone of the music, the uniforms being worn, and their own bodily location – all these were elements which were powerfully expressed in the un-reformed liturgy. Clearly one could have an elaborate perception of the significance of it all without that understanding overlapping in any way with what a theologian might say was happening. Secondly, the understanding is informed by explanations that are external to the action itself. So people were *told about* the Eucharist in catechisms and sermons and, their own perceptions apart, they had to rely on those extrinsic explanations as telling them what they could not ascertain by observation and participation. Therefore, if told that the Mass is 'the unbloody sacrifice of the New Law,'[4] and this is learned and accepted, then there is nothing that is seen or felt at a celebration that challenges this. Indeed, knowing this catechism description, and seeing the two elevations, few stopped to think that the elevations developed so that the people could *see* the species, rather they assumed that this was the actual moment when the sacrifice was 'offered up,' they heard the bells announce these as the key moments of importance, saw the other signs of reverence such as the occasional use of incense and torches, and bowed their heads believing themselves unworthy to look on this event! Merely to be present at such a significant moment was to be deeply involved; the parallel being the way people gather to spectate – and by that act take part in – some significant public event. Younger people sometimes wonder how their grandparents 'put up' with Mass where they lacked understanding of 'what was happening' (meaning they lacked linguistic comprehension), but, in reality, they had an understanding – albeit often a strange one – of what was happening. Their direct ritual experience in the church or chapel on a Sunday morning *and* what they imagined was happening *and* what they were told was happening all coalesced: such a lack of conflicts within a paradigm of understanding breeds intellectual contentment.

However, once the ritual can be entered into linguistically, which is the essence of celebrating in the vernacular – and which should not be seen as equivalent to 'understanding what is happening,' – we enter a completely new epistemological environment with regard to perceptions of the Eucharist. Now the key sources for the conscious appreciation of what one is doing are what one sees and hears and understands through the medium of language *at the actual event*. Perceptions of the event become the event's definition; and the

[4] Phrases similar to this are found in virtually all post-Tridentine catechisms intended for memorization.

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declaration of what is significant within it becomes a function of how the perceiver assesses that significance, and the basis for that assessment of importance is how it is perceived in relation to one's own life. In the former rite these sense perceptions were inchoate (an expert performing a highly specialist task which one observed from 'outside') which were then given form from other sources (such as preaching) and the whole cohered.[5] Now, the perceptions carry their own meaning: one hears what the ritual itself says, one can follow the expert and his actions, and what one understands one is doing is based in what one sees and hears. Extraneous sources of understanding / information are no longer important, even if one still hears them preached or reads them: catechesis has become peripheral. In the new situation existential understanding is derived from immediate experience. We can appreciate this by looking at a parallel event: a football match. For most fans the notion that they would be told what a football match 'means' is slightly ludicrous: a match is not explained, you just go and watch it and that is that. To know it is to experience it, and to experience it is to know it. The only exceptions are explanations to children of technical points and rules, or to a visitor (presumably from outer space) who had never heard of football. But even here we see that the child's need for explanation arises out of participation (e.g. 'why was that allowed?') and the explanation clarifies experience, while with our visitor we would most likely explain football not by a theoretical lecture but by suggesting that the visitor watch a game: to perceive is to understand. This shift in sources of perception – a paradigm revolution in religious epistemology[6] – of those taking part in the Eucharist (bishops, presbyters, and deacons excepted) means that there is a far greater chasm between the 'Old' and 'New' rites than has been appreciated.

For most of the people concerned at the time of the introduction of the new rite, it was simply a collection of changes each of which was not momentous. First, there were the changes in the texts, which were seen as incremental rather than revolutionary. Second, there was the shift to the vernacular, which was seen as essentially practical and which would make easier the task of communication that had been done through sermons and catechisms. Third, a greater participation by the community than was possible in 'the Dialogue Mass' (a creation of the 1950s) due to the use of the vernacular. Therefore, language aside, it could be said that little changed except that the

[5] The limiting case illustrating this point is that many attended Mass in buildings where many of the seats did not provide a view of the sanctuary due to the presence of pillars or the like, and the need for people to see the centre of the action was not a major concern of architects. Today no one would plan a building with side aisles separated by columns or a cruciform building where only those directly in front of the sanctuary area could see it.

[6] And this is quite distinct from the paradigm shift in formal theology.

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'priest faced the people' and the people could see more clearly 'what was happening.' This lack of appreciation of the depth of the change can be seen in that 'the reordering of churches' invariably only involved the sanctuary area, while new churches kept the basic format of the sacral area at the front with the emphasis being on letting everyone see what was happening. However, the effect of everyone seeing what was happening and hearing what was being said was altering the whole basis of understanding more profoundly than any of the changes that were formally authorised. Now, people had to listen to a stream of words which might have little impact on them, sit and listen to readings which seem either wholly irrelevant or else far removed from their existence, while with the mystery surrounding the origins of Communion removed, the act of reception seemed little more than taking part in a child's game: one received not real food but a token in place of food. Now that people were forming their understanding out of their perceptions, the whole affair seemed to many of them to be disappointing.

Moreover, there were new tensions between the words and the deeds: a problem that was hidden in the former rite. So, for example, they were told they were 'a community gathering at or around the Lord's table,' but actually they were sitting and kneeling in rows as individuals spectating what the priest did. They heard it was a banquet, a foretaste of the heavenly banquet, but actually it was words followed by shuffle up to the get a small roundel of special 'bread' that prompted one liturgist to remark that his problem was not believing in Eucharistic change but believing it was bread to begin with! People heard of breaking and sharing, saw this act depicted on banners with two hands breaking what looked in the image like a round loaf of brown bread, yet nothing of the sort took place as the tabernacle continued to be the source of 'ready prepared' supplies.[7] People now recited 'when we eat this bread and drink this cup', but where was this bread that was to be eaten and, in most countries, the cup never leaves the sphere of the ministers.[8] In the new situation,

[7] The *GIRM* 85 and the *RS* 89 express a clear preference for not using the tabernacle (and modern rubricians duly follow this up with recommendations: cf. Paul Turner, *Let us pray: A Guide to the Rubrics of Sunday Mass* (Collegeville MN, 2006), 130–1). However, such 'preferences' miss the point: it is logically impossible to be at a meal at a table and then eat other food than that on the table, and still claim one is at a meal. It is possible in a fast food outlet, but are we happy that such eating provides the image for the Lord's banquet!

[8] Across the continent of Europe it is virtually unknown for communion from the cup to be given at a Mass in a parish. In the few places where it does occur (England and Wales) it is often a case that it occurs on weekdays but not on Sundays ('not practical') while there is a noticeable tendency among younger clergy to restrict this to the relatively few occasions envisaged in documents of the immediate post-conciliar period. This lack of theological understanding can also be seen in the re-appearance of the communion paten

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all these niggling incidents of incoherence can mount up to suggest the whole affair is much over-rated.

To suggest that one of the major unanswered problems of the liturgy after Vatican II is that it produced a sense of incoherence among participants due to a chasm between ideas / words expressed and the actions that are perceived directly might seem a silly exaggeration. On the one hand, this assertion should be understood in context. Firstly, to say this is not to say that this is the sole source of the problems faced by Catholic liturgy today. Anyone with a memory of the last twenty to thirty years knows that churches that were full a generation ago, are now half or more than half empty. This fall-off in religious practice among Christians is a far wider phenomenon than the Catholic Church: it affects every denomination, and the only difference appears to be that it was delayed within Catholicism for a short time due to the resurgence of energy after Vatican II. Likewise, the fall off has many other contributing factors both universal and local. On the other hand, the incoherence of ideas and perceptions is definitely one factor in the current dissatisfaction with liturgy and it is one where a remedy is within our hands. In any event, where understanding is a product of perceptions, any incoherence – and they are often simply 'felt' as distinct from consciously alluded to – is likely to create a sense of dissatisfaction that eventually leads to a rejection of the whole event. We can see this phenomenon in the way that items of electronic software are adopted. If after a few attempts to understand the instructions you encounter contradictions or incidents of incoherence (e.g. the instruction says 'you will now see two buttons' but you only see one on the screen) which are either 'bugs' in the system or unclarities in the instructions, then you tend to distrust the whole product or abandon it as 'too much bother' for what it gives. It is this phenomenon that stands behind the great efforts made by software companies to 'road-test' their products and to make them user-friendly. The basic reality is this: incidents of incoherence in perceptions undermine our sense of understanding; and we tend to distance ourselves from any event we feel we do not understand which we encounter within our everyday environment. The Eucharist, as a vernacular event in which we participate, is no longer located in the *templum* (i.e. the area beyond our everyday experience) but the *profanum* (i.e. the area where we experience events day by day) and if we get a sense that its words and images are far apart from our perceptions, then we caste doubt on the whole event.

From another perspective it might be argued that the fact that these incidents of incoherence in perception are leading people to doubt the value of participating in the Eucharist, or, indeed, that the

to discourage reception in the hand and create again a theology of the Eucharist as 'the sacral commodity.'

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changes that were ushered in by Vatican II were far more fundamental than was appreciated at the time could be taken to imply that there was something fundamental wrong either with the council or its implementation. There is widespread opinion among conservatives that either 'the whole thing was a mistake' or else that the changes 'got out of hand.' Likewise, there is a popular distinction used by those who have a general hesitation about the Council to the effect that one can identify (a) 'the original intention' of the Council, and (b) the subsequent implementation (which, from this perspective, went awry through individuals acting *ultra vires*). In this analysis, the need is to recreate a moment in time in which people would not act as they are doing now (in defining the Eucharist from their experience) but from the treasury of Catholic doctrine. This group whether it is at the episcopal level seeking to issue rubrics and translations with the assumption that one can control meaning as they imagined they could when the rite was in Latin[9], or the popular level of newly ordained priests importing gestures and language willy-nilly into their practice from the former rite, exhibit four confusions. First, they show a poor understanding of the Eucharist if they do not appreciate that it is the celebration of the whole People of God and that it was a deviation due to a series of accidents that the Eucharist was celebrated by the priest with the congregation 'hearing Mass.' The old rite was abandoned because it was seriously faulty, not because someone wanted an up-date (which is not to say that there were not many whose individual piety was not enhanced by that rite). Second, they show a poor understanding of how change comes about in human societies. It has ever been the dream of rulers that they could cause just those changes that they wanted! In effect, history is open, and there are always consequences that cannot be foreseen; but for us Christians there is comfort that it is in this actual world, not in some parallel ideal world, that we have the promise of the Spirit's presence. Third, they imagine that human understanding occurs in an ideal moment (in the manner in which we individually discover the truths of mathematics) and then that moment is privileged, and simply repeated. However, most human appreciation evolves over time and hence we grow in appreciation of those we love, of the arts, and of those activities we participate in – or not. The former rite, precisely because it was beyond the sensible range of most was understood in a matter somewhat analogous to a mathematical proposition: one saw

[9] They did not actually control the meaning because people manufactured meanings from their own experience which were often so bizarre that when they are encountered now by folklore researchers they express doubts that the people whose understandings they are studying 'were ever really Christian'! In effect, the 'control' that Latin offered was illusory, the human imagination is always more fertile than canonical control mechanisms of bishops.

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it once, thereafter one heard about it.[10] Fourth, those conservatives who long for a 'restoration' to the situation in the past exhibit one of the characteristics of all fundamentalisms: a fearfulness in the face of the contemporary situation with the suggestion that the holy is now out of reach. This attitude, quite apart from being an implicit doubt over the reality of the incarnation, confuses the mystique born of ignorance with the mystery of faith.

Faced with the widespread incoherence that results from the chasm between ideas and actions, the task is not to decry the perceptions of people and offer 'education' as a remedy, but rather to confront that chasm between ideas and actions. To seek to remove the incidents of incoherence and enhance the experience such that the celebration is perceived to be what we, in the mode of reflection, know it should be as a sacramental memorial (and as such it is past, present, and future oriented) of the Lord's Meal.[11] In effect, this means recognising that the changes required by the paradigm shift inaugurated by Vatican II are far more sweeping and demanding than any of the ritual changes that have taken place up to now, and that the framework envisaged in the *GIRM* needs to be taken to its coherent logical outcome and not seen simply as a variation on past practice.[12] These further evolutions of the liturgy can be sketched out under four headings: meal; community; loaf; and cup.

[10] Conservatives who argue that one can avoid the situation where people 'misunderstand' the Eucharist through faulty translations or deviations from the rubrics have to face an unpleasant fact about human perception: either one accepts that one cannot control what meanings people will take from events in which they linguistically participate, or one does not allow that participation. In short, they must return to a rite in Latin and de-emphasise other participation (in effect, return to the rite as it was in 1962) or accept the new open situation with its greater demands. The sort of work engaged in by Vox Clara, or the agenda of *Liturgiam authenticam* of 2001, is an attempt at 'a half-way house' and so will ultimately frustrate the conservatives for it will not achieve their aim of epistemic limitation, while it will alienate others who cannot see the problem, and promote factionalism in the Church. The Church set out on an adventure in opening up to the vernacular, just as it set out on an adventure when Trent rejected it when it first became an issue, and like it or not one must accept that we cannot see the outcomes of our actions in the openness of created time.

[11] I developed some aspects of this question in 'The Eucharist as "The Meal that should be",' *Worship* 80(2006)30–44.

[12] We see this in the example already cited of distributing communion from the tabernacle. The new rite clearly saw the reception of communion from bread and wine consecrated at the actual Eucharist as the situation that should exist; however, in the late 1960s the universal practice was to consecrate large ciboria (deliberately designed so that they could contain enough wafers for many Masses) occasionally, and then have only the priest's large bread actually consecrated at most Masses. The framers of the *GIRM* knew that this practice would change slowly and so did not formally ban the use of the tabernacle at an actual celebration. Accepting the logical outcome of the underlying theology of the new rite means that the former practice now simply has to cease and be treated as a practice 'to be avoided' lest scandal be given to those laypeople celebrating the Eucharist.

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If we listen to the language of the liturgy we hear a steady rumble of words such as 'meal,' references to being fed/having eaten, 'banquet,' and gathering around the Lord's table. We refer to the 'table of the Word' and the 'table of the Eucharist' and hear of the Lord setting a table in our midst and inviting us to share in his supper. But given that the whole liturgy belongs to the sacramental world of signs, then what are these: signs pointing to more signs, metaphors upon metaphors? The language of the meal and being gathered at the table has to have primary significance for all the participants in their actually being at a table and seeing that it is a meal. Only if the language of signs that we hear coheres with the rest of our experience as we celebrate an actual Eucharist can those signs (linguistic and non-linguistic) find an echo within us and give focus to what we are doing. The language must provide form to our actions when we gather and vice versa; and the converse also hold: language and action must not jar within our experience of the liturgy. Alas, outside a few specialist liturgical centres and the chapels of some religious orders there is little or no sense of gathering around the Lord's table; rather we are ranged in pews as if we are assembled in a lecture theatre. Most Catholic churches today have, alas, a theatre format which is more than adequate for a community that have a Scripture plus preaching service as their assembly's normal gathering than one where the Eucharist is the community's focus. In a nutshell: if the Eucharist is the centre and summit of the Church, then a table[13] must be the central feature of a church.

It will of course be argued that we no longer celebrate with back to the people, but that misses the point. The rationale for having a freestanding table was to enable the community to gather around it; however, within the culture of the 1960s it was widely assumed that this was a communications gesture: now one could see the priest, his face, and what he was doing. Therefore, the table was pulled out a metre or perhaps two from where it used to be, and now the priest went behind it (and, alas, often used it as a bench from which to introduce and conclude the celebration).[14] The table is a primary symbol: it must be at the very centre of the place of our gathering for we are a people who are most ourselves when we are

[13] The actual object is a table and this is, therefore, the basic sign; 'altar' is a particular theological perspective on what happens at the table.

[14] Pre-conciliar catechesis encouraging the 'apostolate of the laity' often used the slogan "make your workbench an altar" to stress the notion that ordinary work participated in the work of salvation and could be a vocation in a manner equivalent to that of a priest going to the altar. Implicit in this slogan is that the altar in the church building is the workbench of the priest: there he was the *operator* of the *opus operatum*. However, the table is not a workbench in any sense: the table is the place of celebration, it is where the family rejoices with Christ. By analogy, the table is where the banquet is enjoyed and it is not the food-preparation worktops that one finds in a kitchen.

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sharing a table with one another in Christ. To appreciate that the common table, where each of us as baptised has a place, is to have an entire ecclesiology and an entire attitude to the manner in which the Church communicates with the world. It is the table that is the primary symbol: it does not need anything on it to distract from itself, it does not need 'symbols' such as images of crosses or cups or monograms attached to it, hung on it, or embroidered onto its covering. It must speak of eating, of being gathered around it, of it being our domestic place as members of the church. So it must speak to the observer of its 'tableness' not of it being a stone of sacrifice nor a tomb nor a monument. It must be long enough for us to be able to sense we can stand around it for the whole of our act of thanksgiving: and standing there must be a primary part of our experience and as fixed in our imaginations as kneeling in pews for the 'consecration' is now. The meal must be a real meal; it must be such that anyone who observes it, be they a participant or a visitor, would immediately report that what they have witnessed is a large communal meal. This may all sound rather *avant-garde*, but it is deeply traditional. When Pliny the Younger in 113 AD reported on the activities of Christians he noted that it was part of their custom to gather and eat a meal together; I would hope that someone spying on Catholics at an average Sunday Mass would be able to say that it was a gathering for a meal together. Likewise, in Eucharistic Prayer I (and no one desirous of being a liturgical conservative can argue with that source) we pray: *Memento, Domine, famulorum famularumque tuarum et omnium circumstantium*. The sorites of genitives and some fear of the implications led the translators in the late-1960s to render it: 'Remember all of us gathered here before you' which must surely merit a prize for a distracting translation! It could be translated, literally, thus: 'Remember, Lord, the needs of your male servants and of your female servants, indeed of all of us who standing around here.' The point is this: when this prayer was formulated the community, both men and women, stood around the table, imagining themselves as the clients/servants of the Father, and at this table asked for their needs. In the 1960s one could not yet imagine a woman inside 'the sanctuary' (remember the practice of a woman 'answering from the rails'), and so it was that the place of women in this prayer was hidden. Today we do not just need a new translation, but to recapture the reality of being a community of God's servants, women and men, who actually stand around the table.

The second key to removing dissonance between what we say and what we experience lies in focussing on the notion of 'community.' 'Community' and equivalent terms such as 'God's family' assume that we are somehow familiar with one another, know one another, and can relax in one another's company. The focus is on 'we' and the experience of 'we' is something that we feel: just note what happens

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when someone, who is not considered by any well-defined group, speaks within that group using 'we'-language and one appreciates how sensitive we are on this point. People know when 'we' are doing something. Communications experts emphasize the need for a speaker to identify with her/his audience to make contact, but in the assembly of the Lord the 'we' must not just be a communicator's ploy but be a reality. Marketing experts can often remind us of basic structures of our humanity and then how these can be 'used'; the gathering in truth and love must not use gimmicks, it has to be genuine. The community must be such for we really belong through baptism; it must not simply use the folksy language of community. But how can there be this sense of 'we'/ us / community, when very often the only common factor explaining why people are in this place at this time is that it is the only time when the priest is available. Just as making the table the centre may require taking a pneumatic hammer to church buildings, making community central may require taking an equivalent hammer to church structures.

Most Christians down the centuries have not experienced the Eucharist in large buildings with a priest who often has to begin by introducing himself and giving his name. Most Christians lived in small villages and the building was close to the village well – and the community size was less that a hundred persons. Even in pre-modern cities the experience was not that of large churches but of smaller buildings belonging to smaller, sometimes self-selecting, groups. Look at the medieval centre of any European city and you still find churches and chapels separated often by no more than a hundred metres; or look at old prints of European towns and even the smallest will have at least two spires! Each was the place of a community, it knew its cleric and he knew his group. The modern large church is a function of seeing 'the Church' as a service-provider to individuals in a geographical area and then relating this to a scarce resource: priests. In most dioceses the planning of parishes and, therefore, of where the Eucharist is celebrated (and therefore where the dwindling number of priests are located) begins with someone sitting with a map. Get the densities of people, find the most convenient centres, then see how many can be covered, and opt for the points that cover the most people with the least number of centres (which is what is called a matrix analysis by mathematicians).[15] It is exactly the same process as a general who has to defend a long front with

[15] Some commentators even argue that one of the needs of the Church is that this process should be put on a fully professional basis in the way it is in corporations that have to supply services over whole regions, see the approach of D.R. Hoge, *The Future of Catholic Leadership: Responses to the Priest Shortage* (Kansas City, MO, 1987), 86–107 where it is the option that is seen as least 'problematic' in that it does not require changes in Canon Law.

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inadequate forces uses to locate his artillery. However, this process is from the standpoint of the Eucharist up side down. It assumes that the Eucharist is a commodity supplied by the priest to those who want it, and 'community' is simply a pious collective noun for this set of individuals who seek out and obtain the commodity.

The starting point must be real communities, and the pastoral objective the creation of such communities, that in the face of the consumerist individualism of modern, often dysfunctional, societies, are models of people seeking to work together as sisters and brothers and which model the larger society the Christian way of being community, the alternative way of living that is held out by John: 'By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another' (13:35). Such real communities have a natural, human-sized, size, and within such small communities we should expect the Spirit to provide for that community all the skills that are needed, and then these have to be actualised and ratified within the *oikumene* by various commissionings and ordinations. Only when community is real, can the nature of the Eucharist as the gathering of the community in Christ be real. It should go without saying that a vocations crisis is a contradiction in terms with regard to priesthood which pertains to the very essence of the community in that the Eucharist forms the essence of the community. The task is to actualise the skills there to preside, and we will need more presiders than we have such small communities to allow for people being absent through holidays, sickness, or just giving the community a chance to escape the monotony of the same voice and perspective.[16]

The third key is that we respect the language of the whole of the tradition when we recall that the Eucharist involves taking a loaf of bread,[17] a natural unity, and breaking it so that we can each share in it and thus it becomes the vehicle of our union with and in Christ. 'Because there is one loaf, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf' (1 Cor 10:17). This is something that is fully appreciated by *GIRM* which states 'The meaning of the sign demands that the material for the Eucharistic celebration truly have the appearance of food' (n. 321) and mentions that the 'hosts' should be capable of being broken in several pieces for 'at least some of the faithful.' It also stresses the importance of the fraction, but the most recent versions (2002) say that it 'should not be unnecessarily prolonged, not should it be accorded undue importance' (n. 83). Here lies a confusion which even a recent legalist approach to the topic

[16] On this question of size of communities and its links to the number of priests, see T. O'Loughlin, 'How many priests do we need?' *New Blackfriars* 86 (2005) 642–57.

[17] See T. O'Loughlin, 'Translating *Panis* in a Eucharistic Context: A Problem of Language and Theology,' *Worship* 78 (2004) 226–35.

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considered' hard to reconcile . . . with others in the same paragraph.'[18] Moreover, in all the official documents there is the repeated injunction that the 'bread' must be unleavened, along with a curious piece of mythic history that this practice is *secundum antiquam Ecclesiae latinae traditionem* (Canon 926). I cannot imagine any historian using the phrases 'ancient tradition' for any development that occurred in the tenth century, which was originally against the canonical opinion of the time, and which only became fixed in Latin law when Eastern Christians objected to the innovation.[19] The whole situation is a confusion: the legislators want both to have their cake and to eat it! If the Eucharist is formally a meal, then we must eat food. The food is the material bread: and bread in all cultures is a leavened reality. Azymes was the exception to highlight Passover, and as such it is the exception that proves the rule. Leavened bread was the universal practice from the beginning and it is the Latin church that broke with that practice and it must face the fact that it is a practice that needs to be restores for three reasons: first, it is the inherent demand of the symbolism of food; second, it began as an abuse that was unrecognised because the Eucharist itself was being reified as the most sacred commodity (an object rather than an action), and third, it removes one more, small but important, division between the churches of the east and the west. Likewise, it wants a fraction because this was part of the basic ritual of Jesus, but at the same time does not want it to take up too much time or have 'undue importance' and so wants (for the majority) to continue to use individual pre-cut roundels, which are *de facto* counter-signs to the message of the fraction, because these are convenient and sub-consciously they 'know' that what is important is the consecration and getting communion: the shapes, etc., are merely 'symbolic'! Lastly, the notion that it is enough if some could have a broken piece is tokenism: but tokenism within a sacramental act is meaningless, signs within signs creates semiotic confusion between what we are doing and its transfinite significance.

The basic reality of our eating is that instead of having our separate plates of food (normal meal practice) we become part-takers in the unity of the loaf which is Christ. In sharing it, we become one body and that body is Christ. This requires a return to actually ancient Latin canon law which requires that we use a single, fresh, white, sufficiently large, and living loaf.[20] The idea of using stale or unleavened bread was then considered absurd: how could the living

[18] P. Turner, *Let us pray*, 127.

[19] See R.M. Woolley, *The Bread of the Eucharist* (London 1913), *passim*; and J.H. Erickson, 'Leavened and Unleavened: Some Theological Implications of the Schism of 1054,' *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 14 (1970) 155–76.

[20] See T. O'Loughlin, 'The Praxis and Explanations of Eucharistic Fraction in the Ninth Century: the Insular Evidence,' *Archiv für Liturgiewissenschaft* 45 (2003) 1–20.

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bread which comes down from heaven (Jn 6:51) be represented by non-living bread (which is stale or unleavened)?[21] If we have human-sized real communities, then having a loaf that can be broken into a hundred or so shares is not difficult, and seeing clearly that each of us is going to have a share of that one loaf resting on the table while we offer the prayer of thanksgiving, all the linguistic references to sharing in the one loaf, and not least 'take this all of you and eat of it,' will make perfect sense.

The fourth key to removing dissonance within our present Eucharistic practice is to have one cup that is shared by all who participate in the meal. We give maximum solemnity to the instruction 'take this all of you and drink from it' and then give minimal or no heed to the action. As with the use of azymes, we have to overcome a long cultural memory of non-use of the cup, and defending that non-use in misguided controversies since the time of Jan Hus (c. 1372–1425), and then we have the 'practical problems' that appear as the corollary argument to changing nothing. However, this symbol – wholly unique to Jesus[22] – it central to our whole celebration and it is inherently practically awkward! Sharing food is common across most societies, but sharing a cup is deeply counter-cultural: it is this distaste at a common cup that lies behind both the Catholic withdrawal of the cup from all but the priest (in effect, he did not want to share his cup with *hoi polloi*) and the practice in certain Protestant churches of using individual thimbles of wine 'for hygienic purposes.' But in failing to take up the challenge of Jesus's practice we are being un-faithful to a central part of his legacy: we are so united in him that we share his cup, and, indeed, willingness 'to drink the cup that I drink' (Mk 10:38) is a basic call of discipleship. If practicalities, speed, convenience, spillages when handling a cup of liquid, were concerns in Jesus's mind, he would have opted for standard practice at meals: individual cups with the meal's presider saying a blessing over his own cup and thereby a blessing over each. However, in choosing this format we must assume that he deliberately wished the use of one cup, with all the shock and bother, to be impressed on us in our meal. Therefore, not only must the cup be used, but all practices less

[21] See Woolley, *The Bread of the Eucharist,* 1–22.

[22] There is no other attestation of the practice of sharing a cup in either ancient Jewish or secular sources (see J.P.Meier, 'The Eucharist at the Last Supper: Did it happen?' *Theology Digest* 42(1995)335–51). The recent work by A.B. McGowan (*Ascetic Eucharists: Food and Drink in Early Christian Ritual Meals*, Oxford 1999) which has shown that in many early communities, and continuing in places at least until the third century, water was used instead of wine in the Eucharistic cup; but while this has sparked several other studies (e.g. M. Daly-Denton, 'Water in the Eucharistic Cup: A Feature of the Eucharist in Johannine Trajectories through Early Christianity,' Irish Theological Quarterly 72(2007)356–70), it is not pointed out that if both water or wine were being used, what was common was the fact that both were drunk from *one cup*.

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than that of a single cup (e.g. many cups to speed things up or the use of a flagon from which multiple cups are filled) must be seen as a confusion arising from the notion of the Eucharist as a commodity. Equally, those 'work-arounds' intended to avoid the cultural distaste and inconvenience of one cup (e.g. intinction, spoons, tubes, or thimbles) all miss the point. Drinking from one cup is culturally bizarre and practically difficult, but in doing it we are in continuity with the meal practice of Jesus, which is our fundamental reason for gathering as a community for this meal.

The changes in the theology and culture of the Eucharist that began with Vatican II have had far reaching implications for how the Eucharist is experienced by Catholics. What the Eucharist is within the understanding of Catholics is now a matter of direct ritual experience and very often that experience reveals a chasm between the words used and the actions performed. This chasm then leads to disenchantment with the event and a reduction in the Eucharist's perceived importance, often to the point of disappearance, in the Christian life. This consequence of the two great changes of the 1960s now confront us with a choice: either we revert to celebrating in Latin on the assumption that we can re-create the conditions of an earlier epistemology and semiotics, or we can see the difficulties as resulting from not carrying the changes to their logical conclusion. While, no doubt, a reversion to Latin would be aesthetically attractive to many this is not an option without embracing the ideology of fundamentalism as one's basic semiotics. On the other hand, carrying the changes initiated by Vatican II to their logical conclusion has the advantage of restoring continuity between our celebrations and those of earlier periods that were formative of the Latin tradition.

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