New Blackfriars

DOI:10.1111/nbfr.12198

Theologies of Intercommunion: Responding to a Recent Papal Request

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Pope Francis's request

For many years now, certainly since the publication of *One Bread, One Body* issued in 1998[1] which was taken up by many episcopal conferences around the world, there has been noticeable silence on the issue of intercommunion from official quarters within the Catholic Church. Apparently most Catholic bishops – and many Catholic theologians – considered that the matter was closed: here was a conclusive and concluding argument. By contrast most theologians who were not Catholics, and indeed many who were, considered the issue anything but closed: the urgency of ecumenism[2] and indeed the very nature of the Eucharist[3] meant that *One Bread, One Body* could, at best, be seen as a *status quaestionis* from the Catholic side illustrating the need for urgent theological development. Moreover, at a pastoral level the questioning became ever more frantic among those in inter-church marriage (the majority situation in many parts of the world) and with increasing ecumenical contact at grass-root level which prompted questioning as to 'why can we not share' and 'why cannot we extend hospitality?' However, by and large, this questioning went unanswered except for the repetition of formula: 'eucharistic communion must follow full ecclesial communion' which seemed to most a statement that could only be interpreted as an eschatological condition rather than as a postulate in sacramental or pastoral theology.

However, this stasis has now been shattered by a surprising papal intervention. As reported in *The Tablet*, 21 November 2015, p. 29, Pope Francis, while on a visit to Rome's Lutheran Church was questioned about 'the prohibition on Lutherans receiving Communion

[1] Issued by the Catholic Bishops' Conferences of England and Wales, Ireland, Scotland, London and Dublin 1998.

[2] G. Hunsinger, *The Eucharist and Ecumenism: Let us Keep the Feast* (Cambridge2008).

[3] G. Lindbeck, 'The Eucharist Tastes Bitter in the Divided Church,' *Spectrum* 19/1(1999)1 and 4-5.

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[which] causes them sadness' by a Lutheran woman, married to a Catholic. The Pope in reply gave a somewhat curious answer: '[he] stressed that he would not "dare to give permission to do this" and said that the question should be left to theologians.' It must seem strange to many that the Bishop of Rome says he would not 'dare' to pronounce on this. It clearly falls within his powers as the supreme legal authority in the Catholic Church on matters relating to the discipline of the sacraments that he *could* pronounce on this matter. Therefore, his hesitation must be taken as an act of self-limitation: it would be inappropriate for a pastor, even a Bishop of Rome, simply to reply 'off the cuff' in what is a serious matter. Perhaps the Pope is aware of how *obiter dicta* of his predecessors have been taken as having a quasi-revealed status in many quarters and this has led him to suggest that these are issues for the whole community of believers (*Christifideles*) rather than for one man, even if that man is styled 'the *vicarius Christi*.' This interpretation is reinforced by his assertion that it is a matter for theologians. This clearly is a break with the position of *One Bread, One Body* whose underlying assumption was that there was little more for any theologian to say on the matter. However, it is clear that this issue is now again open for discussion – and theologians have to respond and seek out all the ramifications of the issue afresh. Moreover, this is an urgent issue for theologians because that question posed to Pope Francis by the Lutheran woman in Rome is one that is posed in a thousand households every Sunday where there are two Christians who find the very symbols of our unity in Christ, the Eucharist, becoming the barrier and a source of pain between them.

What follows is an attempt to take up the implicit call to theologians by Pope Francis to examine the issue afresh, and to do so in such a way that we simply do not repeat the arguments, and consequently the conclusions, that have led us to the present impasse both pastorally – the Eucharist belongs, after all, to the domain of Christian *praxis* – and theoretically.

Meals and the memory of Jesus

Anyone familiar with scenes in which the evangelists present Jesus to their audiences knows that one of the commonest settings is that of a meal. This is a theme most often pursued in terms of the sequence of meals in Luke's narrative;[4] but it does not matter which of the

[4] See D.E. Smith, 'Table Fellowship as a Literary Motif in the Gospel of Luke,' *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106(1987)613-38.

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gospels one looks at, one finds Jesus eating and, indeed, the highpoint of his presence among his followers is located in the great Passover meal we refer to as 'the Last Supper.' But this is true just as much of John.[5] The gospel begins with the meal in Cana – Jesus, his family and his disciples – joining in the banquet celebrating a young couple's marriage in a tiny agricultural settlement in rural Galilee.[6] It ends with the equally wondrous meal at daybreak on the shore of the Sea of Galilee – of all the invitations we recall from Jesus surely the least attended to is this: 'come and have breakfast' (Jn 21:12). Between the Cana banquet and the barbecue breakfast – note the unusual, outdoors charcoal fire (21:9) – comes the great meal before 'the festival of the Passover' (Jn 13:1). This meal accounts for about a quarter of the whole gospel and should force on us a basic fact about the Christian proclamation: it was originally heard at community meals, it contained vast amounts of table talk and conversations at table, and much of it presupposes a table setting for its understanding. This is obviously the case with such events as those relating to Jesus' manner of blessing the Father and then sharing a loaf and cup with those with him at table,[7] but it is equally true about the meals where he broke social conventions by 'eating with sinners and tax collectors' (Mk 2:16), meals which shocked companions (Lk 7:37), the foot washing at a meal in John 13,[8] or any of the post-resurrection meals such as Emmaus (Lk 24).[9] Moreover, the community celebrated their relationship to Jesus as Lord in meals; and this has continued albeit in a very ritualised form – down to today. In short, one needs to think of meals, tables, and table companionship in order to hear, read, or recall our gospels in context. Most Christians have little problem with this notion of context on the large-scale – and seek to have an adequate picture of Jewish society in the Greco-Roman world – but we need also to remind ourselves of context on the small-scale: these are stories that were performed at shared community meals.[10]

[5] See E. Kobel, *Dining with John: Communal Meals and Identity Formation in the Fourth Gospel and its Historical and Cultural Context* (Leiden 2011).

[6] Cana was a tiny village, now only ruins, rather than the large town on the modern pilgrim trail; see L.J. Hoppe, 'Cana of Galilee: The Two Candidates,' *Bible Today* 48(2010)161-7.

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

[8] See T. O'Loughlin, *Washing Feet: Imitating the Example of Jesus in the Liturgy Today* (Collegeville, MN 2015), 31-52.

[9] See T. O'Loughlin, 'Another post-resurrection meal, and its implications for the early understanding of the Eucharist' in Z. Rodgers, M. Daly-Denton, and A. Fitzpatrick-McKinley eds, *A Wandering Galilean: Essays in Honour of Seán Freyne* (Leiden 2009), 485-503.

[10] See D.E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis, MN 2003).

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The forgotten meal

Given that many Christians, and most Catholics, usually hear the gospels in the context of a celebration of the Eucharist this table-focused aspect of the *kerugma* might seem a great source of pride in faithful continuity. They were originally heard at the community meals, and that is where they are still heard today! We are doing well! While it is always fascinating to note such continuities – it is the very basis of a whole style of theology that sees constancy over time, continuity with the past, and links with origins as the touchstone of orthodoxy – it is also worth noting that there are implications within these continuities which can be very unsettling. For example, while today and for the last fifty years, Catholics have been happy with the language and imagery of meals used in relationship to the Eucharist, this was not the case for many centuries. Protestants might refer to a celebration of 'the Lord's Supper,' but Catholics steadfastly rejected meal language in favour of the language of the 'unbloody sacrifice.' Moreover, it is very hard to think of being 'gathered around the Lord's table' when the architectural language of churches was exclusively that of temple-separation: behind railings, elevated in a 'sanctuary' where the celebrant imagining himself in terms of an Old Testament sacral figure (a *sacerdos* rather than a presbyter) prayed: 'take away our iniquities … we might be found worthy to enter with pure minds the Holy of Holies … (*Aufer a nobis*).' Equally, given that for at least a millennium it was very rare for anyone except the celebrant 'to receive communion' at most Masses, very few associated 'Mass' with eating or drinking. It may have been recalled as being 'instituted' during a meal, but that did not mean than people – ordinary folk, priests, or theologians – thought that the Eucharist was in its fundamental shape, a meal. Meals were one thing – and belonged to the world of ordinary life; the Eucharist was something quite other and belonged firmly in the temple. Indeed in some languages, such as Irish, the place of its celebration was known as a *teampall* (from *templum*) and the fact that this is found in so many place names (e.g. Templemore) shows how longstanding is this approach to the Eucharist: meals and eating belong in the world-outside-the-temple (the *profanum*) while the Eucharist belongs within the sacred space which is entered fully only by those 'set apart.' This might today be seen to be overstating the case: surely the ordained did not think of themselves in this way? One need but read the novels of Canon Sheehan (1852-1913), cunningly promoting clerical reform through fiction, to see how willingly they embraced the notion of 'the Levites of the New Law' and described themselves with terminology taken from the Books of Leviticus and Numbers. In such a world, meals had little to do with the Eucharist, its understanding or its place in church structures. Indeed, the Eucharist was the very opposite of

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food and feeding: if one were 'receiving communion' one had to fast from midnight. It was only from 1953 that one could drink water during that fast.[11] So food, meals, tables, and eating were one thing, the Eucharist, Mass, and Holy Communion were quite another! Things only began to change in the early twentieth century with the movement for frequent communion. This was often spearheaded by groups, such as sodalities, encouraging a monthly communion for their members. But this movement was hampered by three problems inherited from the past that were yet to be addressed.

First, because a link had been made between confession and receiving communion, even a monthly communion required confession. Hence the old sodality pattern: they met for sermon and Benediction on Friday evening, on Saturday evening the members went to confession, and then as a group went to the early Mass on Sunday and took Communion. When this linkage of going to confession with receiving communion first occurred is hard to determine – there is evidence for it in the seventh century – but it was established at the highest level of law almost exactly 800 years ago at the IV Lateran Council in 1215.[12] The reception of communion by non-priests had become such a rarity – many people never went to communion – that it had to be made a law that one must go, under pain of sin, at least once a year. Since one had to be in a state of grace, then one had to have gone to confession – so it too became an annual event and was directly linked with Communion.

Second, even if one went to confession one had to maintain that 'state of grace' – the 'soul' was imagined as being in need of isolation from contamination in much the same way we see medics handling sterile dressings – between confession and Communion. This was commonly interpreted to mean – and this was far more widespread than its extreme form in Jansenism – that this meant sexual continence. So 'going to Communion' was seen as tantamount to broadcasting the level of one's sexual engagement. This led directly to the cultural phenomenon, still visible in some countries, that saw 'getting communion' as being an activity of the young, the old, and the single: the majority of the married male population were, at best, 'the hardy annuals.'

Third, the fasting laws made it virtually impossible to have 'a lie in' on the only rest-day of the week and still 'receive.' It was simply taken for granted by clergy and laity that only at the early Masses would Communion be distributed. The outcome was a pastoral impasse. On the one hand, from the period between 1900 and 1914 there was a recognition that Communion should be

[11] The Instruction, *De disciplina circa ieiunium eucharisticum servanda*, of 6 January 1953, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 45(1953)47-51.

[12] Denzinger-Schönmetzer 812-4.

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'frequent' – for example it was taken for granted that some would be able to receive daily; on the other hand, there were practices, conventions, assumptions and even laws that belonged to an earlier view of frequency of reception – and these only began to change in the 1950s, and, arguably, those changes have still a long way to go in many places. Only last summer I witnessed a presider who asked at the conclusion of the Liturgy of the Word for a show of hands of those who 'wished to go to Communion'; then the requisite number of wafers was counted into a ciborium.[13] This man did not realise he was acting out a theology discredited over a century ago.

So we have a sequence of events over time. First, a realisation dawns of the inadequacy of an existing approach to understanding and carrying out something relating to our practice of Christian faith. Second, this insight begins to take practical effect in the living out of that faith. This now is hampered by conflicting with other parts of our inheritance of both understanding and practice, and these only gradually come into a new alignment. And, because so much of the understanding of Christian faith is conveyed informally, in a myriad of little actions and comments, it can take centuries for the older inadequacy to disappear.[14]

The Eucharist as a Meal

Despite the fact that on each feast of Corpus Christi choirs sang '*O sacrum convivium*' and every parish's tenor had '*Panis angelicus*' as his party-piece, few linked the Eucharist with actual conviviality or Communion with eating a share of a loaf, much less drinking of a common cup. This recognition that one could only engage with the early theologies of the Eucharist by recognising the fundamental fact of it being a meal only dawned very slowly. The first to recognise it explicitly was a Dutch Calvinist theologian named Campagius Vitringa (1659-1722) who pioneered the idea of looking at ancient Jewish sources as a means of understanding the origins of Christianity. To us this seems so obvious as not to need comment, but it was then revolutionary and won him few friends.[15] In his *De synagoga vetere* (1696) he examined the place of meals in ancient Judaism and he began to see that one could understand accounts

[13] On how such practical matters convey a whole theological position to those who observe them, see T. O'Loughlin, 'The liturgical vessels of the Latin eucharistic liturgy: a case of an embedded theology,' *Worship* 82(2008)482-504.

[14] See T. O'Loughlin, 'Liturgical Evolution and the Fallacy of the Continuing Consequence,' *Worship* 83(2009)312-23.

[15] Alas there is no modern study of his work or, more importantly, of his methodology, and his Latin is less than pellucid.

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of Jesus at table far more profoundly if one realised that the table, blessing God at table, and then sharing in a meal could be a fully religious event in its own right. For Vitringa, the Eucharist could be seen as the Christian analogue of the Shabbat meal, the Eucharistic Prayer as the equivalent to the 'grace' at that meal, and that in both cases 'memorial' and 'memory' meant something far different to the 'tape recorder' model of memory that had dogged Christian disputes since the thirteenth century. Little happened for more than a century after Vitringa's death – and, in any case, his work was far from the purview of Catholics.

The matter was re-opened in the early nineteenth century by Benedictine scholars who began to look at early Christian documents to see if this would throw light on 'Christian origins.' They looked at Justin Martyr's account afresh and they looked at Philo's *De vita contemplativa* and recognised two points. First, names like 'Mass' were neither ancient nor descriptive of the basic reality of the liturgy. The '*canon missae*' was a prayer of thanksgiving to the Father – so the whole event should be called 'the Eucharist.' Second, they recognised that all the early sources – for example Paul in 1 Cor – made an assumption that there was a meal. But this brought them up against a double problem. If it was originally a meal, could the actual practice of recent centuries be described as being 'in continuity' with the early church? And, if they started speaking about meals, would that not mean that the Reformers were more correct than the Catholics when they used terms like 'the Lord's Supper'? The response took the form of imagining that the Eucharist and the community meal were somehow distinct. Some said that the Eucharist took place *at* a meal – implying that they gathered for the Eucharist and while there had meal as a community building exercise. Others said the Eucharist was celebrated *within* a meal – implying that the meal was merely a convenient external form and as such was 'accidental.' The real meal could disappear and it made no difference because that was merely *the context* of the Eucharist – this approach is still widely found among theologians.[16] Others tried to distinguish 'the Eucharist' and some other gathering 'the *Agape*' as really distinct events – one was a purely religious affair (which, admittedly, had some meal features: an altar imagined as a table, grace, eating, drinking) while the other, 'the *Agape*,' was really a meal (with, admittedly some religious features: a table imagined as an altar, grace, eating, drinking). But at the heart of each of these 'work arounds' of the problem was one basic assumption: a human meal could not be a sacred event, the sacred and the ordinary had to be radically discontinuous. This might

[16] This solution can be found in N. Mitchell, *Cult and Controversy: The Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass* (Collegeville, MN 1982).

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seem strange given that such discontinuity was the very point that we rejected in our theology of the incarnation and labelled 'Docetism'. Likewise, this discontinuity did not sit well with the maxim from Aquinas '*gratia non tollit naturam sed perfecit*'[17] but it still held sway – and the current fear of a translation that accords well with everyday speech shows that a docetic approach to liturgy is far from dead within Catholicism.[18] The crisis came to a head in 1884 when the publication of the *Didache* exploded all those attempts to square the circle. For Protestants it showed that the Eucharist was at the centre of early Christian life – rather than a rare peripheral, while to Catholics it showed that the Eucharist was a real meal focused on giving thanks to the Father rather than the confection of the presence of Jesus. But even this discovery did not deter some from reasserting the sixteenth-century certainties! Some Protestants responded by seeking to portray the *Didache* as a fourth/fifth century forgery (and so it did not have the force of a witness to 'New Testament'); while Catholics accepted this late date but put it out of play by saying it was a document produced by heretics (and so did not challenge their views on the Eucharist).[19] Some, most famously Gregory Dix, held it was irrelevant by simply taking the Eucharist – *Agape* distinction as an absolute and ignoring the fact that it was both inconsistent and inadequate to explain the evidence.[20] Indeed, it is only in the last few decades that the full significance of the fact that the meal of the Christians – at which they blessed the Father in the way that Jesus had taught them and shared the loaf and cup in his way – has become widespread among those who look at the early churches. The epitaph to the older 'work arounds' to avoid this conclusion has been given by an Australian scholar:

> Dix consigned the meal of the *Didache* to the obscure category of the *agape*, understood to be another form of ritual meal whose very vagueness has often made it a convenient dumping ground for the unwanted meal evidence of the first few centuries.[21]

[17] The phrase is taken from *Summa theologiae* 1,1,8, ad 2.

[18] See T. O'Loughlin, 'A liturgy of the Word and the words of the liturgy,' in T. O'Loughlin ed., *Liturgical Language and Translation* (Norwich 2014), 31-8.

[19] See T. O'Loughlin, 'Reactions to the *Didache* in Early Twentieth-century Britain: A Dispute over the Relationship of History and Doctrine?' in S.J Brown, F. Knight, and J. Morgan-Guy, eds *Religion, Identity and Conflict in Britain: From the Restoration to the Twentieth Century. Essays in Honour of Keith Robbins* (Farnham 2013), 177-94.

[20] *The Shape of the Liturgy* (London 1945), 48, n. 2 – Dix manages to dismiss the whole problem posed by the *Didache* in a footnote!

[21] A. McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists: Food and Drink in Early Christian Ritual Meals* (Oxford 1999), 21-2.

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'Making a meal of it'[22]

But if we fully accept that the central Christian gathering takes place at a meal, we the baptised gathered around a table, does it make any difference except that catechists can draw lovely pictures of meals, exegetes can delve into another layer of historical understanding, and homilists can draw attention to meal symbolism that pervades the liturgy and its prayers?

Meals are a human institution: indeed, without them we would not be human! We are the only animals who prepare our food, who engage in cooking and the transformation of what we eat from its raw state, and for us food is always more than 'fuel' or nourishment. It is always worth noting that food is not only that which sustains us, but is a basic focus of all existence. Most of the time of most of the people who have ever lived has been spent in the task of obtaining, preparing, and eating food.[23]

Meals are not only central to survival; they are at the heart of every human culture. No shared meals means no culture, no society. As an Italian anthropologist of food has recently observed:

> That the dining table is one of the best places for communication – perhaps the ideal place, where the desire to communicate with one's familiars is expressed with ease and freedom – is so evident and so readily observable in daily life that there is no need for historical confirmation.[24]

From such a perspective to hear that Jesus taught at table, that he is described as 'the bread of life' or that we should see the table as the ideal place for talking with the Father and where our sharing in the loaf and cup can be seen as 'communion' should be equally apparent. But the nagging question remains, does it make a big difference to what we do? And, just as importantly, if it is really important, have we a consistent practice in relation to it or are we still perpetuating other practices that are in conflict with it (just as there were continuing practices in the twentieth century that conflicted with the new insight that 'receiving communion' should really be a frequent event)?

[22] See B. Witherington III, *Making a meal of it: rethinking the theology of the Lord's Supper* (Waco, TX 2007); D.E. Smith, and H. Taussig, *Many Tables: The Eucharist in the New Testament and Liturgy Today* (London 1990); and H. Taussig, *In the Beginning was the Meal: Social Experimentation and Early Christian Identity* (Minneapolis, MN 2009).

[23] It is this point, frequently made by anthropologists and those concerned with 'food security,' that forms the starting premise for my recent book: *The Eucharist: Origins and Contemporary Understandings* (London, 2015).

[24] M. Montinari, *Medieval Tastes: Food, Cooking, and the Table* (New York, NY 2012)177.

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The starting point is to recognise that whenever we share a meal there are certain expectations and that sharing food is not an activity devoid of its own internal meaning. Whenever we share food, from that very fact flow some consequences independent of me, other participants, and indeed our wills. A meal has its own grammar, its own in-built message, and this is as much a fact of the human universe as the arrangement of elements in the Periodic Table. We humans exist with and flourish with the grammar of meals, we do not invent it nor can we simply set it aside. The grammar of meals is neither arbitrary nor in the realm of the voluntary. I, if I wish to be a human being in society, must acknowledge this grammar and we call it 'good manners.' 'Good manners' are often dismissed as little more than effete conventionalism and this is exemplified as knowing which spoon to use or how to peel a banana with a knife and fork. But if one wants to see the importance of manners, simply share a table with someone who is without them! Not only will the salt not be passed, but every dish will surround the miscreant, the best portions will be on his plate, and silence will ensue as, rapidly, all communication will appear either useless or a provocation to 'table rage.' Every adolescent (at least since the time of Homer where it is noted) has thought it exciting to rebel against table manners, in effect: to deny the grammar of meals, and yet our civilisation and happiness depends upon them.[25]

Now it could be objected – particularly since I shall argue that there is major discrepancy between current Catholic legal practice and the grammar of meals – that this is more obscure anthropology being 'imported' into the sacred domain of theology. Alas, if the statements attributed to Jesus in the gospels have any significance for Christian practice, the opposite is true: many, if not most, of the dining memories in the gospels only make sense to us precisely because we appreciate in our deepest humanity the grammar of meals. For example, we like to eat with those who are like us, and avoid eating with those we do not like – unless one appreciates this we cannot understand what Jesus is saying to the sinners and tax collectors when he eats with them. The invitation to the shunned Zacchaeus: 'Zacchaeus, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today' (Lk 19:5) only makes sense because both know that sharing a table means forgiveness and acceptance. Likewise, the negative reaction and Jesus' reply assume this common knowledge (19:7-10). In a similar way, the significance of the betrayal by Judas Iscariot is heightened by the fact that he has been, almost to the very moment, one who has shared the table with Jesus (Jn 13:26). But the

[25] This topic has generated a vast literature which is all too unknown to liturgists, theologians, and pastors: the best place to start is with M. Visser, *The Rituals of Dinner: The Origins, Evolution, Eccentricities, and Meaning of Table Manners* (London 1993).

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most explicit appeal to the grammar of meals is found in the story in Lk 11:5-10: it is assumed that an unexpected visitor must be fed as part of a true welcome no matter what the hour. So important is this that one might have to knock up a friend to help – and a shared sense of the human grammar of meals is even more important than friendship, and the neighbour gets up and gives the one who has annoyed him the three loaves he needs for his guests' meal.

Intercommunion

If we view the Eucharist as a gathering at table for the Lord's meal, then how does the grammar of meals affect those who are present who do not identify themselves as Catholic Christians? In the distribution of the consecrated species model of the Eucharist this is not a problem: the priest, in virtue of powers imparted by ordination, confects the sacrament and as an act whose existence is imagined solely within the ecclesial frame, that church can choose how to legislate for it: it is solely its property and so can choose who can receive it. This is, for example, the crisp logic of the document *One Bread, One Body*, and that of other churches who adopt a similar position,[26] and is well nigh impregnable. But if one replaces the notion of a sacral commodity regulated for the church by the view that the Eucharist is a meal shared by those who thank the Father through, with and in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, then that logic dissolves and must be replaced by one which begins with, and respects the grammar of meals – for to ignore it would be to destroy the very basis in humanity which underpins the sacramental mystery.

Consider this situation: there is a family meal and others are invited. They arrive and are seated at table, the food is placed on the table but an instruction is given by the host that only the family may eat is then issued: the others may sit and watch, may join in the conversations, but they must stare at their empty plates while next to them others whom they know feast. The mere bringing of the image before our minds is enough to show its absurdity. Surely no one would be that gauche, no one would be that insulting to people they know, no one would have so little understanding of 'how things are done.' In short, someone that ignorant of the grammar of meals is so unusual that the rest of us would assume that person was, *in mente*, outside the human community; in Homer's language that person would not be a 'bread-eater' (*sitófagos* which is synonymous with human), but only an anthropoid animal. Everyone at the table,

[26] See, for example, K. Ware, 'Church and Eucharist, Communion and Intercommunion, *Sobornos*t 7(1978)550-67.

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family or not, would describe the host's actions as 'savage' and say that they were uncomfortable and embarrassed by the whole performance! The grammar of meals demands that those at table all have access equally to the bounty of the table (for which we should thank the Creator), and are made a community of shared values, along with shared food, in the very act of being at the common table. Indeed, anyone who has ever been at such a family meal knows that (as is the case of the meal grammar underlying the parable in Lk 11:5-10) that the visitors are those who are put first. So in families there are little codes when there is really not enough to go round, that 'the family holds back.' Likewise, when you are only expecting one person, and then their partner arrives along with them, one knows that whatever happens to oneself, the two guests must not feel un-welcomed or made to feel awkward: why would you invite someone to a meal and then make them feel 'under a compliment.' This grammar is not only beyond our control, without it there would be far more warfare and disputes among us: we become truly human around the table.[27]

Applying this grammar to the meal of the Eucharist we see that we cannot assemble as a family, sisters and brothers as we proclaim ourselves to be in the liturgy, to eat at the Lord's Table and then behave in a manner that would be so unacceptable if it happened at any other table. To be there means that we behave honourably and generously, sharing what we have. If one is there at the meal, and we presume that one is there freely – and thus does not object to giving thanks to God, one behaves as at a meal and one is treated as at a meal. If someone objects to the purpose of the meal – offering through, with and in Christ thanks to the Father – then that person would not remain and would refuse to eat with us; but if one does remain, then we cannot refuse to share with that person.

It might be objected that if someone comes to a family table, there is at least an implicit invitation, but that the Eucharist is simply 'there' for all comers. This sort of objection fails because it confuses the current practical shape of our liturgies with what we should be doing if we were giving full account both to the words we proclaim at our liturgies and to what we state is our understanding of these words.[28] At present, if one says 'there is a Mass at 10 a.m.' one is announcing a service which is then chosen by those who want to

[27] See M. Jones, *Feast: Why Humans Share Food* (Oxford 2007).

[28] The position that it is not an intimate meal, but simply 'there' would indeed imply that the celebration was really no more that a 'collection point' for a sacral commodity – the very reason that 'giving communion' outside of a celebration of the Eucharist was marginalised in the aftermath of Vatican II. However, since there is eating involved the grammar of meals would once again assert itself and this would render it as not a banquet but 'fast food' – an obviously unacceptable view of eucharistic sharing and one of the reasons of the liturgical reforms of the 1960s.

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avail of it. Then those who turn up can be processed as those who qualify for the full service or not. This is analogous not to a meal but to a garage offering to test winter tyres on cars: 'if you bring it here, it will be tested' and you are free to opt in or out of this potential service. However, the assumption underlying all liturgy is radically different. Here the assumption is that we have assembled at the divine invitation manifested through the Church and we have accepted that invitation in baptism. Every other assembly of us, as brothers and sisters in Christ, is a family matter, an intimate affair, where we model the new People of God who has been brought into existence 'in the blood of Christ' (cf. Eph 2:11-3). There is simply no place in our liturgical understanding for the notion that a liturgical gathering is a 'take or leave it' impersonal service, much less that the liturgy purveys a commodity which some suitably qualified persons can 'get'. Every gathering is a meeting of part of the family of the baptised and if that gathering is for the Eucharist, it is to be seen as a family meal where the human dynamics of such meals apply. One cannot have baptised people there and then refuse to share with them – to do so breaks the grammar of meals which is intrinsic to the event. Moreover, we have ancient evidence, from the Acts of the Apostles, that this precise style of reasoning was used to overcome some of the earliest disputes about Christians eating together.[29]

Where are we now?

We saw earlier that there was a time-lag of decades between the realisation around the beginning of the twentieth century that it should be a normal part of Mass 'to receive Communion' – and implicit in this was the recognition that many centuries of practice, preaching which treated "going to Mass" and "taking Communion" as distinct activities (and theologically that there is a distinction between the Mass 'as sacrifice' and 'as sacrament'), was simply wrong. The reality had dawned that it should be expected that those who took part in a Eucharist would also 'be going to Communion.' However, it then took many years for other parts of the whole *official* web of law, rubrics and customs to catch up with that insight and make it practically possible. And in many places this insight has not yet penetrated into the popular consciousness of Catholics.

A similar situation has occurred with regard to the renewed awareness that the Eucharist is the meal of the baptised and that the primary way to approach it is through understanding the meal as the

[29] See T. O'Loughlin, 'Sharing Food and Breaking Boundaries: reading of Acts 10-11:18 as a key to Luke's ecumenical agenda in Acts,' *Transformation* 32(2015)27-37.

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materia sacramenti whose human reality must be respected as part of God's creation according to the principle *gratia non tollit naturam sed perfecit*. This allows us again to discover the insights of all of the meals of Jesus, his blessing of the Father, and the mystery of participation: 'The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The loaf that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?' (1 Cor 10:16). But we now must face the inherited web of laws and regulations that are preventing this understanding from coming to practical fruition at actual celebrations, just as we need to face at the level of praxis many inherited customs which communicate a counter message to that understanding. While this time-lag may be understandable, that does not excuse any delay: human beings take part in the Eucharist, they hear its meal language, and they feel affronted, in the depth of their humanity, when there are restrictions placed on sharing at the table.

So we now face twin tasks of 'catching up.' At the official level we need to move far beyond the level of intercommunion envisaged in the 1983 *Code of Canon Law* and question the approach taken by various Episcopal Conferences in documents such as *One Bread, One Body*. At a practical level, we need to give more clear expression to the fact of the Eucharist as a meal in terms of the arrangement of liturgical space,[30] the food we use, and the manner in which it is shared. At the level of communication we need to take this meal dimension to heart as a central plank of our understanding rather than seeing it purely as a theme in talking to children, and, more importantly, we need to search out those informal communications which may be conveying, incidentally, a conflicting and inadequate theology.[31]

In the Year of Mark in the lectionary we have the readings from John 6 known as 'the Bread of Life Discourse' on Sundays 17 through to 21 which forms the core of Lectionary Unit 2:3 (Jesus manifests himself) within the lectionary's overall plan.[32] The most fundamental aspect of this part of John – before we look at any of its wealth of detail – is that the Christ is located at the very heart of our humanity: he is the bread, the basic foodstuff, of life. As such our nature as meal sharing animals must be taken seriously if we are to understand Jesus who sat and sits with us at table, blessing the Father, and sharing the Bread of Life. If this is our understanding of this mystery, then our liturgical arrangements, both in regulations and

[30] See R. Giles, *Re-Pitching the Tent: Re-ordering the church building for worship and mission in the new millennium* (Norwich 1996).

[31] See T. O'Loughlin, 'Eucharistic Celebrations: the Chasm between Idea and Reality,' *New Blackfriars* 91(2013)423-38.

[32] See the 1981 *General Introduction to the Lectionary*, table 2 (*Lectionary*, vol. 1, p. L).

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in praxis, must respect the grammar of this part of our humanity – and, indeed, it should model before all people an ideal of inclusion and the divine welcome, of care for the poor and the marginalised, and be a banquet that echoes the prophet's vision of 'the Lord of hosts making for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear' and which in its generosity to all present is a *pignus futurae gloriae*.[33]

The comments of Pope Francis

While the Bishop of Rome dared not give permission to have intercommunion, it is clear from his other comments that he sees the Eucharist as the food common to all the baptised. As reported in *The Tablet* Francis said:

> A pastor friend once told me that "We believe that the Lord is present there, He is present." What's the difference? There are explanations, but life is bigger than explanations and interpretations. ... ... I ask myself: but don't we have the same Baptism? If we have the same Baptism, shouldn't we be walking together? And you're a witness of a profound journey, a journey of marriage: itself a journey of family and human love and of a shared faith, no? We have the same Baptism.

This indicates that Francis sees the context for a solution as not lying in an exegetical analysis of the Eucharist – conceived as a theological essence – but in the place of the Eucharist in the dynamic of the Christian journey beginning in Baptism and embracing human love, marriage and those most important of human journeys – those which take place in the relationships of family life. This is, in itself, a major contribution to the whole debate because it begins with a unity (our baptism) and in the concrete (the actual life-journeys of particular Christians) rather than in an abstract question (in what would full ecclesial communion consist?) or matters of long dispute (the nature of eucharistic presence) where consistent solution of the various contradictions that have arisen over the course of time is virtually unobtainable.[34] But in addition to our common baptism we might also look at other fundamental human commonalities. To be human is to be a meal sharing animal, and because this meal sharing is fundamental to us, meals have an inherent grammar that is beyond

[33] Isa 25:6; and the final line of Aquinas's antiphon for the Magnificat for Evening Prayer for the Feast of Corpus Christi.

[34] See E.B. Pusey, *The Doctrine of the Real Presence as Contained in the Fathers* (Oxford 1855).

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the domain of human constructions – and since we must adhere to the fundamental meal nature of the Eucharist, this grammar is primordial to any regulations we might impost upon it.[35] We cannot *both* affirm a common baptised humanity *and* refuse to share the meal of the baptised, without denying the very nature of the event that we have gathered to celebrate.

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[35] See T. O'Loughlin, *The Eucharist: Origins and Contemporary Understandings* (London 2015), 95-121.

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