A Proposal for Eucharistic Hospitality: Are We There Yet?

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Introduction

With some amusement—and a bit of sympathy for my parents—I can remember sitting in the back seat of the car with my parents who were taking us to Florida. Impatiently, we would frequently call out to my dad, “Are we there yet?” During what seemed an eternity, he wearily responded, “Not yet.” Those of us engaged in ecumenical dialogue likewise impatiently ask: “Are we there yet? Can we offer Eucharistic hospitality?” In order to formulate a response to this question, we need to ask a few others.

Are we clear about the process? We who are engaged in ecumenical initiatives need to remind ourselves that the process is not in our hands. True communion is a gift of God. Because communion is a gift of God, we “cannot agree ourselves into full communion.” We also need to remind ourselves that there is a goal, an expected end: full communion. We cannot be satisfied to
occupy ourselves with endless dialogue on the presumption that this is enough.

Are we clear about the goal? Perfect agreement? Communion of the Churches? Are these two things the same? If we reach agreement on every doctrinal point, does that mean we are thereby in full communion, that we have “agreed ourselves” into the unity that is the will of Christ? We have the sad experience of two ecumenical councils: The Council of Lyons (1274) and the Council of Florence (1431-1449) achieved full agreement.¹ Nevertheless, while agreement had been achieved—communion had not. The documents were signed by all parties but rarely implemented on the part of the Orthodox Churches.

Can we achieve sufficient communion for Eucharistic hospitality without agreeing on everything? Perhaps at some point—through an evolution of tolerance of doctrinal differences—we might be obliged to agree to disagree, a modus vivendi. Disagreement does not necessarily mean division; not every issue is “Church dividing.” Can we be distinct Churches, with expressions of doctrine and discipline that do not fully coincide, but be in communion with each other to the extent that we can share in joy the blessings of sacramental sharing?

I offer for your consideration the proposal that perhaps we have arrived at the possibility of eucharistic sharing, even though we continue to exist as distinct Churches. This advocacy of Eucharistic hospitality is not to create a tool to unite our Churches, but rather a sharing of God’s grace and possibly a celebration of the communion we already share.

¹ “Full agreement” is imprecise. The issue the practice of divorce in the Greek Church remained an open issue after the Council of Florence, but apparently did not pose an obstacle to full unity. The Greeks were concerned about the double episcopal and parochial jurisdictions that had been established in the same territory, without achieving a common resolution. See Joseph Gill, The Council of Florence (Cambridge: The University Press, 1959) 297.
We should begin with an acknowledgement of the Christological agreements in which Catholics and Orthodox declare that we share a common understanding of the nature of Christ, the dividing issue of the fifth century. In order to create a context for Eucharistic hospitality, we shall examine the discipline of sacramental sharing of the Catholic Church. Lastly, we shall reflect on the possibility of Eucharistic hospitality under a given framework.

**Common Declarations and Agreements**

Through the grace of God and initiatives of visionary individuals of our Churches, the issues that gave rise to our divisions in the fifth-century have for the most part been resolved.²

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A sophist might argue that since the fifth-century disputes the source of the divisions—have been settled, our Churches are no longer divided. Things are not that simple. For the past 1500 years our Churches have each gone their own way and developed doctrine and discipline. Convergences and divergences of doctrine and discipline now exist. (There is no guarantee that our Churches will not develop practices that would create additional divergences.) We must be grateful that we continue to share in the same sacraments and apostolic succession. However, our history, with its occasional eruptions of antagonisms, cannot be ignored. That is why the Christological agreements marked the beginning of the dialogues between our Churches.

During the twentieth century, other Christians engaged in ecumenical dialogues, but the Catholic Church was opposed to such an approach and distanced itself from ecumenical initiatives such as the World Council of Churches. Until the middle of the


Although it is not directly pertinent to our Churches, the Anglican Communion decided to ordain women to the episcopacy. On the question of the ordination of women to episcopal office, Pope John Paul II wrote a very earnest letter to Archbishop Robert Runcie of 8 December 1988 and spoke openly of “new obstacles in the way of reconciliation between Catholics and Anglicans” and of the danger of “block[ing] the path to the mutual recognition of ministries.” Cardinal William Kasper, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, gave a discourse to the Church of England bishops’ meeting 5 June 2006, on the question of ordaining women as bishops. https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/to-anglicans-on-episcopal-ordination-of-women-3915

“In recent times more than ever before, [the Lord] has been rousing divided Christians to remorse over their divisions and to a longing for unity. Everywhere large numbers have felt the impulse of this grace, and among our separated brethren also there increases from day to day the movement, fostered by the grace of the Holy Spirit, for the restoration of unity among all Christians. This movement toward unity is called ‘ecumenical.’ UR 1b.

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twentieth century, only Catholic approach to Church unity was a willingness to allow the schismatics and heretics to return to the flock.

The Second Vatican Council (1962-65) marked a sea-change. The Orthodox and Catholic Churches, although separated, possess true sacraments and through apostolic succession the priesthood and the Eucharist and are therefore linked in the closest intimacy (quibus arctissima necessitudine adhuc nobiscum coniunguntur). Because of this relationship, sacramental sharing (communicatio in sacris) is not only possible, but encouraged by the Catholic Church. Note that from the perspective of the Catholic Church, it is the degree of communion already achieved that permits sacramental sharing in certain circumstances.

The Catholic Discipline of Sacramental Sharing

In presenting the Catholic disciplinary principles regarding sacramental sharing, I shall refer to a few Catholic documents:

1. Two decrees of the Second Vatican Council: Decree on the Eastern Catholic Churches and Decree on Ecumenism;

5 The Sacred Council gladly notes all this. It has already declared its teaching on the Church, and now, moved by a desire for the restoration of unity among all the followers of Christ, it wishes to set before all Catholics the ways and means by which they too can respond to this grace and to this divine call.” UR 1c

6 “These Churches, although separated from us, possess true sacraments, above all by apostolic succession, the priesthood and the Eucharist, whereby they are linked with us in closest intimacy. Therefore some worship in common (communicatio in sacris), given suitable circumstances and the approval of Church authority, is not only possible but to be encouraged.” UR 15c.


2. The *Code of Canon Law,*⁹ governing the life of the Latin Catholic Church;
4. The 1993 *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*¹¹ (abbreviated as ED) issued by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity;

It might be simplest to begin with the general statement that the Latin and Eastern Catholic Churches provide, in certain exceptional circumstances and with restrictions, for the sharing of six of the seven sacraments. Of course, this is from a one-sided Catholic perspective! These expansive provisions are indicative that sacramental sharing—albeit in exceptional cases—is indeed already a reality among the between the Eastern Catholic and Orthodox Churches.

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⁹ vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html


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Baptism

“Baptism is conferred with water and with a formula which clearly indicates that baptism is done in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” (ED 93). This basic principle allows for the Catholic Church to recognize the validity of baptisms administered not only in the Orthodox Churches, but also in ecclesial Communities. Factors such as to the faith of the minister and the manner in which water was used do not automatically render the baptism invalid in the mind of the Catholic Church.13

It is possible for an Orthodox person to serve as a godparent in a Catholic baptism along with a Catholic godparent.14 In like manner, Catholic can serve as a godparent in an Orthodox celebration of baptism, provided he or she is invited. Such an arrangement has an effect on the responsibilities of the godparents: The Orthodox godparent would be responsible for educating the child in the faith.15

The Catholic Church generally requires that in order for an infant to be licitly baptized, there must be a founded hope that the infant will be educated in the Catholic Church,16 a condition that the potential minister of the baptism must verify. However, the Catholic Church makes an exception:

Infants of non-Catholic Christians are licitly baptized if their parents request it and if it is physically or morally impossible for them to approach their own minister.17

With this exception, the Eastern Code provides that a child could be licitly baptized in the Catholic Church, but not become a member of the Catholic Church. Rather, the baptized infant

13 ED 95.
14 ED 98 (b).
15 CCEO c. 685 §3; ED 98.
16 CCEO c. 681 §1, 1°.
17 CCEO c. 681 §5 / CIC c. 868 §3.
would be a member of the Church or ecclesial Community of his or her parents. This is another provision of *communicatio in sacris* that allows for Catholic ministers to serve the Orthodox Church in exceptional cases without even the appearance of proselytism.

**Chrismation**

Like their Orthodox counterparts, the Eastern Catholic Churches celebrate the sacrament of chrismation on the occasion of baptism.\(^\text{18}\) For this reason, the ecumenical provisions regarding baptism are generally applicable for chrismation. The Catholic Church recognizes the validity of the administration of chrismation by Eastern priests—Orthodox and Catholic—to all Catholic faithful, including those of the Latin Church.\(^\text{19}\) Latin priests need a special faculty in order to confer the sacrament on Eastern faithful.\(^\text{20}\)

**Penance and Anointing of the Sick**

It is lawful for a Catholic priest to administer the sacraments of penance and anointing of the sick to Christian faithful of Eastern Churches not in full communion with the Catholic Church, when they are unable to have recourse to a minister of their own Church and provided that they request them and are properly disposed.\(^\text{21}\) Likewise, when there is a spiritual advantage and avoiding error or indifferentism, Catholics who are unable to approach a Catholic minister can receive the sacraments from an Orthodox priest.\(^\text{22}\) Of course, it should be noted that these are provisions of the Catholic Church and may not be found acceptable by the Orthodox Churches.

\(^{18}\) CCEO c. 695 §1.

\(^{19}\) CCEO c. 696 §1.

\(^{20}\) CCEO c. 696 §2.

\(^{21}\) CCEO c. 671 §3 / CIC c 844 §3; ED 131.

\(^{22}\) CCEO c. 671 §2 / CIC c 844 §2; ED 132.
Marriage

There are many ecumenical dimensions to the sacrament of marriage.

Let us begin with the determination of what laws are to be followed in the celebration of marriage. Taking into consideration the basic right of persons to marry, several bodies of law govern marriages celebrated in the Catholic Church. The marriage of Catholics is governed by divine law, by positive (canon) law both common and particular, and by civil law with regard to merely civil effects. There was a lacuna in Catholic Church law regarding the law to be observed by baptized non-Catholics who enter into marriage with a Catholic. The Eastern Code filled the gap and provides that baptized non-Catholics are bound by the matrimonial laws of their own Church or ecclesial Community or the law to which they are subject if their ecclesial Community has no marriage law. This same principle is applicable in adjudicating the validity of a marriage between baptized non-Catholics: the laws to which the parties were subject at the time of marriage must be observed. With regard to canonical form, if either of the parties is a member of an Eastern Church, the marriage must have been celebrated with a sacred rite.

Regarding the celebration of marriage:

- A Catholic minister can be present and participate in the celebration of a marriage between Eastern Christians and a Catholic and Eastern Christian in an Eastern Church, if they are invited to do so by the appropriate authority of the Eastern Church.

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23 CCEO c. 778 / CIC c. 1058.
24 CCEO c. 780.
25 CCEO c. 781. This provision has no counterpart in the Latin Code, but was incorporated an instruction to be used in Latin tribunals. See Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts, Instruction Dignitas connubii, 25 January 2005, arts. 2 and 4.
26 ED 127.
• A Catholic may read lessons in an Eastern church if invited to do so. An Eastern Christian may be invited to read the lessons at similar services in Catholic churches.27

• A member of an Eastern Church may act as bridesmaid or best man at a wedding in a Catholic church; a Catholic also may be bridesmaid or best man at a marriage properly celebrated in an Eastern church, observing the requirements of the relevant Church. In all cases this practice must conform to the general discipline of both Churches regarding the requirements for participating in such marriages.28

While Eastern Catholics are obliged to observe a certain canonical form that includes an exchange of consent in the presence of their pastor, bishop or one delegated by either of them who confers a blessing and two witnesses, the Second Vatican Council recognized the validity of the celebration of a marriage between an Eastern Catholic and Orthodox by an Orthodox priest.29

The agreement between the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church also marks a significant advance.30

Our two Churches desire to foster marriages within the same ecclesial communion and consider this the norm. However, we have to accept the pastoral reality that inter-Church marriages do take place. When such occasions arise, both Churches should facilitate the celebration of the sacrament of matrimony in either Church, allowing the bride/bridegroom the right and freedom to retain her/his own ecclesial communion, by providing necessary

27 ED 126 and 133 (in the case of a eucharistic celebration).
28 ED 128.
29 CCEO c. 834 §2. This provision was also incorporated into the Latin Code in c. 1127 §1.
30 Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church: Common agreement on Inter-Church Marriages, approved by the Holy See and Patriarch Mar Zakka I Iwas, 25 January 1994 (Information Service 84 [1994/III-IV] 159-161.
information and documents. On the occasion of these celebrations, the couple as well as their family members belonging to these two Churches are allowed to participate in the Holy Eucharist in the Church where the sacrament of matrimony is celebrated. We consider it also the great responsibility of the parents to pay special attention to impart to the extent possible and in mutual accord proper ecclesial formation to their children in full harmony with the tradition of the ecclesial communion to which they have to belong.31

The doctrinal and disciplinary premises of inter-Church agreement can serve as a basis for Eucharistic hospitality.

**Eucharist**

The Vatican II Decree on Ecumenism describes the tension between the prohibition and the promotion of common worship:

> Yet worship in common (*communicatio in sacris*) is not to be considered as a means to be used indiscriminately for the restoration of Christian unity. There are two main principles governing the practice of such common worship: first, the bearing witness to the unity of the Church, and second, the sharing in the means of grace. Witness to the unity of the Church very generally forbids common worship to Christians, but the grace to be had from it sometimes commends this practice.32

The current discipline of the Catholic Church bears witness to the close relationship between our Churches without ignoring the differences that remain and indeed separate us. Further, the Catholic position allows for us to share the graces given to us by God.


32 UR 8d.
As in the case of penance and anointing of the sick, the Catholic Church provides the possibility in an exceptional way for Catholic faithful to receive the Eucharist from Orthodox ministers when it is physically or morally impossible for them to approach a Catholic minister.\(^{33}\) The Church gives certain cautions to the faithful who wish to receive the Eucharist in an Orthodox Church:

Since practice differs between Catholics and Eastern Christians in the matter of frequent communion, confession before communion and the Eucharistic fast, care must be taken to avoid scandal and suspicion among Eastern Christians through Catholics not following the Eastern usage. A Catholic who legitimately wishes to communicate with Eastern Christians must respect the Eastern discipline as much as possible and refrain from communicating if that Church restricts sacramental communion to its own members to the exclusion of others.\(^{34}\)

Likewise, the Catholic Church provides in an exceptional way for Catholic ministers to administer the Eucharist to Orthodox faithful who are unable to approach their own priest, are properly disposed and who request it.\(^{35}\) The Ecumenical Directory counsels due consideration for the discipline of the Eastern Churches for their own faithful and the avoidance of any semblance of proselytism.\(^{36}\)

There are a few grave weaknesses to the Catholic arrangements. Perhaps the greatest weakness is their one-sided quality: The Catholic Church is unilaterally articulating matters regarding the sacramental life of Orthodox faithful and Catholic faithful in an Orthodox Divine Liturgy.

\(^{33}\) CCEO c. 671 §2 / CIC c. 844 §2; ED 132.

\(^{34}\) ED 124.

\(^{35}\) CCEO c. 671 §3 / CIC c. 844 §3; ED 131.

\(^{36}\) ED 125.
While the provisions might appear to be presumptive and intrusive, I assure you that the Catholics are indeed well-intentioned. It might be useful to recall an anecdote from the 1960’s. Most Orthodox Churches did not accept Pope John’s invitation to send observers to the first session of the Second Vatican Council. An Anglican bishop, John Moorman, went to Constantinople to persuade Patriarch Athenagoras to do so. The simple message of the Anglican bishop was “They are in earnest.”

The second weakness is the underlying factor of exceptionality. Sacramental sharing is possible only in exceptional cases and is never simply an opportunity. The Catholic Church now clearly admits that there are situations—albeit exceptional—in which Catholic faithful can receive sacraments from Orthodox priests and Catholic ministers can administer sacraments to Orthodox faithful. Does this exceptionality allow for an expansion of possible situations?

The proposal that follows is a call for a mutual expansion of possibilities for Eucharistic hospitality.

**Proposal for Eucharistic Hospitality**

At the beginning of this reflection, I posed the questions, Are we there yet? Are we at the point that we—though different Churches—can share the Eucharist? In the midst of pandemic, social upheaval and climate change, we might unexpectedly become aware that it is time to share in the infinite and powerful graces of the Eucharist as we continue on our journey of faith, so that we can greet the Second Coming of Chris as one Church. We may not be a united Church, but can we not share the graces with each other?

Can we allow for persons to receive the Eucharist in either Church, while maintaining the position that the Churches are distinct and that membership in them is not modified by this practice?

There are theologians and canonists who admit the intimate relationship between our Churches, but rightly point out the differences. They argue that until these are resolved and full communion exists, our Churches cannot share the Eucharist. This is a real tension between already and not yet. With regard to sacramental sharing, the not yet prevails. The already allows for only exceptional cases.

We have already pointed out above that the Second Vatican Council identified two main principles governing common worship: “first, the bearing witness to the unity of the Church,” and second, “the sharing in the means of grace.” The Ecumenical Directory describes how the Decree on Ecumenism articulates a tension between two principles:

The first principle is that the celebration of sacraments in a community bears “witness to the unity of the Church” and the second principle is that a sacrament is a “sharing of the means of grace” (UR §8). In view of the first principle the Directory states that “Eucharistic communion is inseparably linked to full ecclesial communion and its visible expression” (ED §129) and therefore, in general, participation in the sacraments of the Eucharist, reconciliation and anointing is limited to those in full communion. However, applying the second principle, the Directory goes on to state that “by way of exception, and under certain conditions, access to these sacraments may be permitted, or even commended, for Christians of other Churches and ecclesial Communities” (ED §129). In this sense the Directory expands on the second principle by stating that the Eucharist is spiritual food for the baptised that enables them to overcome sin and to grow towards the fullness of life in Christ. *Communicatio in sacris* is therefore permitted for the care of souls within certain circumstances, and when this is the case it is to be recognised as both desirable and commendable.
From the Catholic perspective, the principle of the “sharing of the means of grace” allows for the administration of the Eucharist to Oriental Orthodox on an exceptional basis. This exception to the requirement of full ecclesial communion logically admits the possibility that Eucharistic hospitality between our Churches is possible. Can we not expand the possibilities?

Perhaps our Churches can acknowledge the power of the already and allow for our faithful to receive the Eucharist in a non-exceptional manner. In all ecumenical exchanges, we must be cautious of the dangers of false irenicism, error and indifferentism. A more expansive discipline regarding the reception of the Eucharist can address and avoid those dangers. A false irenicism is the willful neglect to recognize that differences exist. With an expansive approach to Eucharistic hospitality, we acknowledge that we are still distinct Churches, that these differences do exist and cause our separation. We need to continue to work. Error is the incorrect understanding of the teaching of our respective Churches. A vigorous catechesis that points our points of convergence and divergence can not only enlighten the faithful, but provide a deeper understanding of the faith. Lastly, an indifferentism that views all the Churches as the same and adherence to one set of beliefs as inconsequential can again be countered with an accurate understanding of ecclesial communion and identity.

In Catholic canon law, all the faithful are ascribed (enrolled) in one of the twenty-four Churches sui iuris and are obliged to fulfill with great diligence their duties to their respective Churches sui iuris. However, the faithful can receive the sacraments in any of the Churches sui iuris without transferring from one to another. These Churches sui iuris all share the same faith, so one might imagine that the canonical borders would

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38 Admittedly, this is not the position of the Oriental Orthodox Churches.
39 CCEO cc. 27, 39 and 35.
40 CCEO c. 12 §2.
be more porous, but there are clear principles that maintain the stable demographics of the weaker Churches. The same principle can be agreed upon and established by our Churches in order to retain a stable ascription status for Orthodox and Catholic faithful. What a blessing such an arrangement would be for the growing number of families with ties to both of our Churches and who would no longer need to make a choice!

For We All Share in the One Bread

We have been separated for 1500 years and, thank God, relations between our Churches are now cordial. Some might question the need to hurry. Without assuming an apocalyptic posture, we live in a time of crisis. At a meeting of the Italian Church on 10 November 2015, Pope Francis said:

Before the problems of the Church it is not useful to search for solutions in conservatism or fundamentalism, in the restoration of obsolete conduct and forms that no longer have the capacity of being significant culturally.

We are not living an era of change but a change of era.

Perhaps we have arrived at a point where we can share in the one bread?41

41 “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.” (1 Corinthians 10:17)