

home in another country when a war is imminent. And we too hoped the war wouldn't happen and worried about its unforeseen consequences. But I couldn't get around this question: if we withdrew our hundreds of thousands of troops that were pressuring Saddam to accept weapons inspectors, what would happen in two or three years? (We obviously couldn't keep such a credible force there on alert for years on end.) Saddam would again kick out the inspectors and proceed with his efforts to build a bomb and/or develop chemical weapons. Such an achievement would alter the politics of the Middle East drastically. The possession of a nuclear bomb, as North Korea has shown, changes the relations of nations dramatically. And we simply couldn't afford to let Saddam develop those weapons in a volatile Middle East. (Whether or not he actually had them developed at the time of our invasion is somewhat beside the point. He had the facilities, ability, and the intent to develop them.) These considerations bracket for the moment the argument that the Iraqis had every right to be liberated from such a brutal fascist dictatorship as Saddam's. We are just now finding out how horrendous it was.

With a couple exceptions, the American church folk in Bratislava were fiercely against the invasion. Many said they were ashamed to be Americans. The Slovaks themselves were more puzzled. Their government supported American policy and, while they had anti-war sentiments, they were open to persuasion. Even the Lutheran bishop of Slovakia, Julius Filo, who had just come from a Lutheran World Federation meeting that had roundly condemned American policy, was open to the kind of argument I made above.

So I found myself in sharp contention with most of the Americans there, who also had the visceral contempt for the Bush administration that so many liberals have. I doubt if I persuaded any of the Americans but I think a number of Slovaks had second thoughts about their opposition to American policy.

Many of the dire predictions made about the war did not come true, as was also the case with the war in Afghanistan and with the earlier Gulf War. (Remember that liberal opinion was strongly against the Gulf War, even after such a direct violation of Kuwait and after Bush, Sr., had gathered wide support and UN sanction for the war.)

We are facing a great challenge in rebuilding Iraq. It is a chaotic and lawless country, exhibiting the characteristics of pervasively brutal oppression. Every problem will be magnified by liberals to discredit the man they can't stand. I do hope we will have the resolve and the wisdom to carry out our intentions to build a decent, prosperous, and relatively democratic Iraq. The future of the Middle East might hang on our success or failure. But even if we are successful, Bush will get no credit from his detractors. For them he can do no right.

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The Threat of an Ecumenical Ice Age? Reflections on *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*

Over the last decades, the Christian churches have participated in intensive and world-wide ecumenical discussions on the topic of the Eucharist or Holy Communion. Both the convictions of faith and the doctrinal opinions of the churches have been tested against Scripture, and they have been questioned in regards their internal coherence. Consensus texts and statements of convergence recorded the state of the common recognition of truth [*Wahrheitserkenntnis*]. These ecumenical discussions have been not only tolerated but supported and welcomed by the Vatican. Many Roman Catholic theologians and church leaders from across the world have joined in this warming of ecumenical friendship. Suddenly, however, ecumenical warmth is threatened by a new chill. *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (17 April 2003) from Pope John Paul II advocates eucharist minus communion. This threatens us with an ecumenical ice age.

On the basis of clear statements from Scripture ("he gave the bread to the disciples and said..."), the statement of the Counter Reformation Council of Trent could no longer be accepted: "For before the apostles received the Eucharist from the hands of our Lord, he told them that it was his body that he was giving them." Matthew 26 and Luke 22—texts which even the Pope

refers to (cf. *EdE* 2)—do not allow the words of Jesus to be separated from the giving and receiving of bread and wine. We certainly do not find Jesus issuing some order to reserve and venerate the elements. Not just one but many of the ecumenical declarations at a global level drew from this the relevant consequences.

- For example, the Anglican / Roman Catholic “Windsor Statement” of 1971 states: “The Lord’s words at the last supper, ‘Take and eat; this is my body’, do not allow us to dissociate the gift of the presence [of Christ] and the act of sacramental eating.”

- The 1978 declaration “The Eucharist” of the joint Roman Catholic / Evangelical Lutheran Commission, which was used by the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity in Rome and the Lutheran World Federation, stressed “the common conviction of the meal-character of the Eucharist” and expressly recognized that: “Lutherans and Catholics confess together the conviction that by its very essence the Eucharist is a communal meal.”

- The 1979 Anglican / Roman Catholic text “Eucharistic Doctrine: Elucidation” made clear that, “If veneration [of the reserved elements] is wholly dissociated from the eucharistic celebration of the community ... any dissociation of such devotion from this primary purpose, which is communion in Christ of all his members, is a distortion in eucharistic praxis.” Further consensus texts remain on this line.

The encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* falls behind this level of ecumenical realization in that it expressly seeks once again to support tabernacle piety (25) and approves also of the celebrating of the Eucharist without the community (31). The Pope admittedly confirms that “an ‘ecclesiology of Communion’ [was] the central and fundamental idea of the documents of the Second Vatican Council” and that the sacrament was appropriately called “communion” (34). Yet this “idea” was subordinated to the concern that every valid administration of the sacraments be strictly bound to the ordained clergy. It was stressed unequivocally that, “Catholics may not receive communion in those communities which lack a valid sacrament of Orders” (46)—and with no exceptions.

What can Evangelical Christians do in this situation? In our prayers of intercession we could pray that the Pope and his advisers be given better insight, which may

be more conducive to the Pope’s repeatedly stressed concern of serving the ecumenical community. *Yet we would also have to clearly display our own contributions to the right celebration of Holy Communion, which on the grounds of the Evangelical endeavour to remain faithful to Scripture would be ecumenically effective and should become even more effective.* The celebration of the sacraments without the community could not and cannot be held on the basis of Scripture. At the least, the biblical grounding of a strict connection between the celebration of the Eucharist / Holy Communion and the ordained priesthood remains open. That “the sacrament of priesthood ... effectively [comes] into being at the moment of the institution of the Eucharist,” (31) is a thoroughly problematical claim.

Jesus celebrates Holy Communion with Judas, who betrays him (Mk 14:10f; Mt 26:14-16; Lk 22:3-6), with Peter, who denies him (Mk 14:30f, 53f, 66-72; Mt 26:34f, 57f, 69-75; Lk 22:31-34, 54-62), and with the disciples, who fall asleep in the hour of his need (Mk 14:26, 32-42; Mt 26:30, 36-46; Lk 22:39-46) and who will abandon him and flee. The Communion tradition displays the community of disciples as representatives of the poor, as sinful people accepted unconditionally by God. That the ordained priesthood should be institutionalized here would require an essentially more workable reason than has as yet been given. Even in those texts from Acts or the pauline corpus which address the celebration of Communion among the early Christians, there have as yet been no clear signs to support the indispensable presence of an apostle or ordained priest at these celebrations.

The institution of Holy Communion on the night of betrayal, the fact that Jesus celebrated it with his disciples who are portrayed as poor, lost people who endanger themselves and communion with Jesus—and in the case of Judas even seek to destroy—must be more seriously appreciated. The biblical witness presses the question *whether it is at all permissible for any earthly ecclesiastical authority to deny baptized people access to this celebration when performed in accordance with the biblical words of institution.*

Cardinal Lehmann is right. I believe, after this abrupt encyclical from the Pope, the ecumenical discussion must go on. Evangelical Christians should respect the Roman fostering of apostolic succession and the particular

forms of devotion (e.g. the Pope's devotion to Mary (53ff) which has yet to be fully considered in the ecumenical discussions). Yet we should also be attentive to their biblical foundations and the degree to which they are supportable. They should welcome the endeavour for a proper and worthy celebration of the sacraments (cf. 47ff and the interest in the "Cenacle of Jerusalem", 2). Yet they should also insist upon fair respect for the Evangelical concern to observe eucharistic succession through faithfulness to Scripture.¹

All people who respect Christian communions in the search for truth should insist that the ecumenical discussions about the common foundations of the Christian faith—which are accompanied by academic theology and led in a universally recognized procedure reflecting this joint search—be as respected as international legal

agreements. It must be out of the question that particular churches and church communions—regardless of how old or large, or even how considerable their financial and institutional power may be—can simply disregard the recognitions of truth [*Wahrheitserkenntnisse*] which have been won through a long, worldwide and serious process of agreement. Nor can they base this disregard upon the theological and religious preferences of their leader or leading groups. In the end it is not an ecclesiastical authority but rather the clear testimony of Scripture which calls for the 'the idea of the ecclesiology of communion' to become an ecumenical reality.

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1. Regarding the observance of Eucharistic Succession through faithfulness to Scripture, see M. Welker, "Die Bedeutung des evangelischen Abendmahlsverständnisses in der gegenwärtigen ökumenischen Situation", in Rudolf Weth (ed.) *Das Kreuz Jesu. Gewalt - Opfer - Sühne* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 2001), 197-208. See also: Michael Welker, *What Happens in Holy Communion?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).