

Eucharist and Receptive Ecumenism

All doctrinal development and debate occurs against the background of Christian practice and worship. By attending to what Christians have done in the Eucharist, Kimberly Belcher provides a new perspective on the history of eucharistic doctrine and Christian divisions today. Stepping back from the metaphysical approaches that divide the churches, she focuses on a phenomenological approach to the Eucharist and a retrieval of forgotten elements in Ambrose's and Augustine's work. The core of the Eucharist is the act of giving thanks to the Father – for the covenant and for the world. This unitive core allows for significant diversity on questions about presence, sacrifice, ecclesiology, and ministry. Belcher shows that the key is humility about what we know and what we do not, which gives us a willingness to receive differences in Christian teachings as gifts that will allow us to move forward in a new way.

Kimberly Hope Belcher is Associate Professor in the Department of Theology at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana. She is the author of *Efficacious Engagement* (2011).

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-83956-3 — Eucharist and Receptive Ecumenism
Kimberly Hope Belcher
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

Eucharist and Receptive Ecumenism

From Thanksgiving to Communion

KIMBERLY HOPE BELCHER

University of Notre Dame



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-108-83956-3 — Eucharist and Receptive Ecumenism
 Kimberly Hope Belcher
 Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

CAMBRIDGE
 UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
 One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
 314-321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
 New Delhi – 110025, India
 79 Anson Road, #06-04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
 Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108839563
 DOI: 10.1017/9781108884464

© Cambridge University Press 2021

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2021

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

NAMES: Belcher, Kimberly Hope, author.

TITLE: Eucharist and receptive ecumenism : from thanksgiving to communion / Kimberly Hope Belcher, University of Notre Dame, Indiana.

DESCRIPTION: Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY, USA : Cambridge University Press, 2021. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

IDENTIFIERS: LCCN 2020012887 (print) | LCCN 2020012888 (ebook) |

ISBN 9781108839563 (hardback) | ISBN 9781108813365 (paperback) |

ISBN 9781108884464 (epub)

SUBJECTS: LCSH: Lord's Supper—History of doctrines. | Augustine, of Hippo, Saint, 354-430. | Ambrose, Saint, Bishop of Milan, -397.

CLASSIFICATION: LCC BV823 .B43 2021 (print) | LCC BV823 (ebook) | DDC 234/.163-dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020012887>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020012888>

ISBN 978-1-108-83956-3 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Contents

<i>List of Tables</i>	<i>page</i> vi
<i>Preface</i>	vii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xii
1 The Call of Unity	1
2 Diversity Is the Tradition	28
3 A Phenomenology of Giving Thanks	54
4 <i>Eucharistia</i> and Revelation	80
5 Ambrose's Words and the Roman Canon	97
6 Augustine and the Assembly's Destiny	119
7 Consecrating and Offering the Ordinary	141
8 The Eschatological Exception	168
9 Outdo One Another in Showing Honor	185
10 Into the Heart of God	198
<i>Bibliography</i>	219
<i>Index</i>	233

Tables

2.1 A comparison of Ambrose's commentary on the institution narrative in the mystagogical homilies	<i>page</i> 41
5.1 A structural comparison of the witness of Ambrose and the seventh-century sacramentaries to the development of Western eucharistic praying	101
5.2 The chiasms intertwined in the Roman Canon	104
6.1 The repeating structure of Augustine's Sermon 272, read left to right	131
7.1 The epiclesis in the structure of the Byzantine Catholic Anaphora of Chrysostom and the Roman Rite adaptation of the Anaphora of Chrysostom	146
7.2 Offering, acceptance, and sacrificial imagery in the received text of the Roman Canon	153
7.3 Thanksgiving in the Roman Catholic eucharistic liturgy: acceptance and offering by Christ and assembly	166

Preface

This book has its roots in a dream that connected eschatology and ecumenism at a time when I had words for neither. I have always believed in the God of Jesus Christ, but I was not steadily raised within one particular Christian tradition. When I was in my teens, attending a Southern Baptist Church in Sarasota, Florida, I had a recurring dream in which I was worshipping at a church that was expecting Christ's second coming. In the dream, as the congregation sang together, the floor of the church was filled with an unearthly light and rose into the sky. As we climbed above the trees and buildings, we were able to see other churches, too, rising on the horizon in every direction. Slowly, members of the churches, distracted by the presence of those they considered to be unworthy, began arguing with one another. As the song died out, the light faded and the church began to sink to ground level. I always woke up grieving.

In some ways this dream reflected accurately a time when the blossoming dialogues of earlier decades were giving way to an "ecumenical winter." The intractability of issues of ministry and authority, along with an overwhelming fear that ecumenical commitments threatened confessional identity, led to a withdrawal. Dialogues continued, but many Christians resisted receiving their fruits or implementing practical steps towards unity. A few years after my dream, in 1999, the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification was signed by the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity. In the same year, I began to learn Catholic eucharistic theology, and came into full communion with the Roman Catholic Church at St. Augustine's in Gainesville, Florida. It was from the catechists and pastors at St. Augustine's that I learned that my passion for Christian unity had a name and a place in the

Christian tradition. I became a Catholic and an ecumenist – that is, a catholic – in the same year. Given my location and my history, this book is mostly focused on the Reformation and post-Reformation schisms in the Western church, although I am also interested in dialogue with Eastern Christianities.

To learn, when I began formal study, that the ecumenical movement was in decline came as a surprise. I have come to recognize that ecumenical cooling reflected fear and confusion, but also a necessary period of reflection and discernment for the churches, as well as time to induce conversations in the global South and in traditions outside mainline Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. The commemorations of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2016–17 demonstrate that the Holy Spirit has been at work beneath the ecumenical snows, stirring up life in old seeds. Christians are still finding new ways to work together, pray together, remember together, and imagine a new future; ecumenical spring is arriving, a time for difficult discernments and challenging commitments, for hope and growth.

The Eucharist has always pointed, for me, towards that strange and transcendent union conveyed by my dream, a unity which Christians may receive but also may refuse. To write a eucharistic theology, then, is to write ecumenically and also eschatologically. In my first book, *Efficacious Engagement*, I explored the way that sacramental initiation immerses Christians into the life of the Trinity. Even our prelinguistic and presymbolic capacities are caught up in God's great love for the world. We are anointed to serve creation, in fulfillment of how we were created and of our deepest needs. The gift of the sacramental life, then, is for us: a calling that suits our deep need to live in love with and for others. It is also for the world: we are given over to love God by serving creation.

In one way, initiation leads inexorably to reflection on the Eucharist, which is the height of the communion in Christ established in baptism. In a second way, thinking about the Christian life as the gift of living in love and service toward the world allowed me to reconsider what the Christological and eucharistic sacrificial imagery of the early church might mean today. In a third way, understanding the sacramental life as participation in the Trinity made me see the urgency of ecumenism in a new way. It is not something that can wait while Christians pursue more salient issues, for Christ in whom we live is the firstborn of creation, the head of the one church, and the firstborn from the dead (Col. 1). To steward creation and to hope for eternal life are thus also to be made one with one another in Christ's one church. The call to Christian unity is inherent

to the baptismal vocation of each Christian, even though each may have a different way of acting, corresponding to unique locations in the universal church. In this age of schisms and slow reconciliations, there is a new meaning to the ancient truth that the true grace of the Eucharist is the unity of the church.

Christian unity is the work of the Holy Spirit, into which Christians are invited. Pope Francis's Pentecost homily of 2017 eloquently articulates my hope for a unity that respects the diverse forms of Christian faith and practice:

This is how the word of God describes the working of the Spirit: first he rests on *each* and then brings *all* of them together in fellowship. To each he gives a gift, and then gathers them all into unity. In other words, the same Spirit creates *diversity and unity*, and in this way forms a new, diverse and unified people: the *universal Church*. First, in a way both creative and unexpected, he generates diversity, for in every age he causes new and varied charisms to blossom. Then he brings about unity: he joins together, gathers and restores harmony.¹

Since the Holy Spirit has brought our diversity about as a gift, there is no doubt that the Spirit is also capable of uniting us in our diversity. This basic conviction suggests that the purpose of ecumenical dialogue, rather than finding the right terms for eucharistic theology, is to build bridges that help us to broaden our understanding of the Eucharist, expanding the eucharistic theologies that each tradition can see as legitimate.

Although it is God who must unite us, our action is essential. I want to note three of the methodological choices I have made in this book. First, I have opted to speak from a place of humility, assuming that neither I nor my church has all the answers. Wherever possible, I have tried to leave space for the reconciliation of diverse gifts into a richer, more complex unity. As a part of this commitment, I presume throughout this work that pre-Reformation threads of Christianity belong to all of us. Second, I have turned to ritual and personal experience of the Eucharist to lead me into doctrinal interpretation. I believe that our practice often manifests parallels that become obscured as we try to clothe them in language, particularly precise language. Moreover, much of our liturgical theology began as injunctions to (or against) a particular practice or reflection on practice. These theologies are therefore deeply grounded in the cultural context

¹ Pope Francis, "Holy Mass on the Solemnity of Pentecost" (Homily, June 4, 2017), www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20170604_omelia-pentecoste.html. Francis goes on to describe diversity without unity and unity without diversity as twin temptations that beset ecclesial discernment.

and pastoral needs of the time and place they were written. Attending to this ritual-praxical dimension of theology can clarify the purpose of theologies that at first seemed strange. Third, building on the first two, I have opted for a phenomenological suspension of metaphysical security in this book. As I explain later, I think metaphysics contributes an important theological framing, but I think the Christian experience of the world through the lens of *eucharistia* (thanksgiving) is more fundamental to eucharistic theology than any metaphysics of presence or of liturgical action could be.

The chapters of this book are constructed in pairs. In Chapter 1, I lay out in more detail my sense of how ecumenism and eucharistic theology are connected and the grounds for hope. I turn towards practice as a fruitful source for ecumenical progress and an underappreciated motivation for eucharistic theology. In Chapter 2, I explain the development of eucharistic theology in the context of Christian practice, laying out a series of eucharistic theologies that provide hope for an ecumenical future.

In Chapter 3, I develop a phenomenology of thanksgiving. Ecumenical eucharistic theology has been strongly formed on an understanding of meal sharing as an action that is at once human and divine, mundane and profound. In this chapter, I look at the mundane experience of giving thanks as a similar benchmark for the Eucharist and location for theological retrieval. In Chapter 4, then, I turn to the eucharistic liturgy as a thanksgiving, laying out the way that *eucharistia* asks Christians to turn from imaginary security to an unknown God who gives unimaginable gifts.

Chapters 5 and 6 retrieve key insights from Ambrose and Augustine, who have often served as foils to one another in polemical eucharistic theologies. Acknowledging their deep commonality and attending to the liturgical practice grounding the theology of each, the theology of eucharistic thanksgiving here leads us to acknowledge with Ambrose the cosmic and Jewish dimensions of the Eucharist and with Augustine its eschatological and ethical orientation.

In Chapter 7, I offer a constructive rereading of the contemporary Roman Catholic eucharistic liturgy, with an emphasis on how to understand consecration and sacrifice in an appropriately ecumenical fashion. Thanksgiving makes an apposite bridge between the testamentary and ascension theologies of the Reformation movement and the way sacrifice was understood in the early church, as well as pointing to the best developments in Catholic eucharistic theology in the contemporary period.

Chapter 8 turns to exceptional practices, such as viaticum for Christians near death and the funerals of the great ecumenists John Paul II

and Brother Roger of Taizé. Just as our ordinary practice speaks to the here-and-now ecclesiality of the body of Christ, our exceptional practice often points to our eschatological future and demands we take certain steps to meet it.

In Chapter 9, then, I offer suggestions for practical steps towards full visible unity that can be taken without prematurely answering any questions about hierarchical structure. Grounded in the principle that we should attempt to “outdo one another in showing honor” (Rom. 12:10), I have organized these from easily attainable steps to larger actions that would convey our commitment to ecumenism and simultaneously strengthen our discernment of further pathways. Fitting the approach of humility and self-knowledge, most of my recommendations apply especially to my own Roman Catholic Church. Finally, Chapter 10 serves as a conclusion for the present, drawing together the threads of what I have learned from *eucharistia* and proposing a new ecclesial approach to ecumenism.

Acknowledgments

How can I write acknowledgments for a book that took me almost ten years to write, that poses thanksgiving as its central theme, that even analyzes acknowledgment pages? The task seems only slightly more difficult than that of uniting Christians divided at the table for centuries. I must begin with my first teachers in liturgy and ecumenism: Nanci Carroll, Nancy Dwyer, Connie Fitzgerald, John Gillespie, Tom Hippleheuser, Tim Lozier, Linda Portal, Debra Smith, Bill Slattery, Letty Valentin, Frankie White, and the other staff and parishioners at St. Augustine Church in Gainesville, FL, 1999–2001. From their witness I discovered my vocation, which has been both gift and drive.

Although I began this book before I met them, this book could not exist without my ecumenical partners on the United States Methodist–Catholic dialogue, including Drew Christiansen, Edgardo Colón-Emeric, John Crossin, Ryan Danker, Peggy Johnson, Maureen O’Brien, Nancy Robinson, Don Rooney, William Skylstadt, David Talley, Kyle Tau, Michael Watson, Karen Westerfield Tucker, and Colleen Windham-Hughes. I learned so much from all of you about the spiritual discipline of ecumenism. Your candor and constancy have made me a better theologian and a better Christian.

My Critical Theories seminar at the North American Academy of Liturgy has been an immense source of encouragement, critical feedback, and intellectual generosity. Among many others, I especially recall with gratitude specific wisdom from Ben Durham, Bruce Morrill, Kristine Sunakoro, and David Turnbloom. Without your trust, I would never have been able to write so much vulnerability into this book. Besides my own seminar, Martin Connell, Casey Mullaney, Lauren L. Murphy, Samantha

Acknowledgments

xiii

Slaubaugh, and Colleen Windham-Hughes gave me feedback on early drafts of this work. I also want to recall the help and encouragement of other scholars in my discipline, including Teresa Berger, Paul Bradshaw, Joris Geldhof, Anna Petrin, Sonja Pilz, Don Saliers, John Witvliet, and Susan Wood. Part of the givenness of this project was the new connections it gave me with strangers or new friends. Among many, I especially give thanks for encouraging words from Sarah Coakley, Theodor Dieter, George Hunsinger, Martin Junge, Richard Kearney, Jean-Luc Marion, Paul Murray, Friederike Nüssel, and Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. To John Martino I owe especial gratitude for transforming his service from an obligation into a pure gift.

The past three decades have been described as an ecumenical winter, and I have sometimes been asked during my work on this project what gives me enough hope to proceed. I was supported and encouraged by witnessing the challenging and vulnerable work of ecumenical dialogues, and especially by the commemorations of the Reformation in 2016 and 2017. I am especially thankful for the international Lutheran–Catholic dialogue. I owe gratitude to the entire liturgical team involved in the commemoration of the Reformation, among whom I am lucky enough to call Dirk Lange a friend and colleague.

I have been both inspired and supported by colleagues in my department, especially Neil Arner, Matt Ashley, Brian Daley, Kevin Grove, Max Johnson, Jerry McKenny, and Cyril O'Regan. My chair, Tim Matovina, both facilitated my commitment to ecumenism and assisted me through the proposal process. I was lifted up by our ecumenical worship together on October 31, 2017.

Perhaps most of my hope comes from the commitment to ecumenical understanding and love expressed by my graduate and undergraduate students, many of whom took the call to Christian unity like a breath of air into their lungs. Students from Notre Dame, from Calvin College (now University), and from Loyola University Chicago showed me the hunger for ecumenical understanding that will carry us into the future. I especially want to thank the students who took, audited, and assisted in my Holy Communion, Christian Disunity class in 2015, 2017, 2018, and 2019. They taught me the glory and the urgency of ecumenical dialogue. If these people are the future of the ecumenical movement, then indeed spring has sprung.

Intellectual work can only proceed because of the practical, financial, and communal support of an enormous web of people. I am especially grateful to Ron and Cathy Tisch for their support of the Tisch Family

Chair of Theology at Notre Dame; to St. Gregory's Abbey (Episcopal) in Three Rivers, Michigan, for hosting me during two short writing retreats, and to Fr. William, the guestmaster; the Monastero di Bose and especially Matthew and Francesca; to Julie Gomez who has kept our house habitable for two years; and to the cleaning and administrative staff of the Theology Department at Notre Dame, especially Melody Kesler. My spiritual director, Sr. Mary Lynch, has brought many movements to light that later informed this work. The editorial staff at Cambridge University Press, especially Beatrice Rehl and Eilidh Burrett, have made every rough way smooth. The scholarship, editorial prowess, and steadfast friendship of Catherine Osborne have made this book, in numerous small and large ways, a better book. If you can understand my arguments, you should give her a word of your thanks. If you don't, please give me a word of your prayers.

I owe personal gratitude to more than I can name. Among them, the members of the Tarciryan Knights, especially Tracy Leigh Ens, have reminded me that I am more than just a scholar, and that my real life is the most important thing. Nathan P. Chase has read, debated, discussed, or commented on nearly every page and every problem. He made me believe the project could cohere from its many parts, historical, ritual, ecumenical, liturgical, and theological. Erin Wolf-Chambers knows this book and my mind without reading a single page. Her endless patience and perfect honesty has kept me in the game all these years. Most of all, my spouse, Matt, and children, Thomas, Juliana, and Hildegard, have kept me whole through these years. Matt has been an indefatigable support, taking on all those labors that I periodically had to step away from to make this work possible. From all these people, I have learned how to walk in love and friendship, which is to say in ecumenism and in my faith.

I know I will have forgotten someone who contributed to this work, but God remembers us and all our works perfectly. For the gifts and good work of all those I have not named, for my own vocation and for the constant call of Christian unity itself, I give thanks to God from whom all good things come.

I dedicate this book in thanksgiving to two pastors who formed me sacramentally: Rev. Dr. Lewis Trotter and Fr. John M. Phillips. Dr. Trotter bore the burden of preparing me for my baptism at Northminster Presbyterian Church in Sarasota, Florida. He impressed on me indelibly at age ten that my baptism would plunge me into the waters of the Jordan in which Christ was baptized. I am still unfolding the grace

Acknowledgments

xv

and the responsibility of that vocation, in a way that neither of us could have foreseen. The late Fr. John († October 20, 2019) was a model for me of the simplicity, humility, and hope that marks true ecumenism. Together with the team of St. Augustine's I named in my first paragraph, he taught me an ecumenical and catholic vision of church.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-83956-3 — Eucharist and Receptive Ecumenism
Kimberly Hope Belcher
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)
