

Inculturation: The Bread and Wine at the Eucharist

PHILLIP TOVEY

On Sunday mornings when I preside at the Eucharist I keep an eye out for one of the people in the congregation. If she is there I put a square wafer in the ciborium at the preparation of the table. She has celiac disease, and under the guise of pastoral sensitivity it has become the norm to add the special wafer. I do not even think about the wine, which is usually fortified to stop it going bad.

Questions of inculturation are complex because we are so immersed in our own culture that we often cannot see the wood for the trees. Culture is like that: in it we live and move and have our being. Finding that something does not quite fit our expectations becomes a critical incident for us.¹ It is often easier to see what is being done wrong than to reflect upon our own actions; motes and beams come to mind.

I want to look at the material for the Eucharist, bread and wine, partially because this is the key act of worship of Christians, partially because it has been an issue for me in my ministry, and partially because it is causing some concern in Anglican circles at present. Thus it represents for me work in progress, a development of the comments in my earlier work.²

Church of England Rubrics and Canons

The Church of England uses bread and wine. The 1604 canons talked of the churchwardens providing “fine white bread” and “good and wholesome wine” (Canon 20). The 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* of the Church of England says that to avoid dissention or superstition it shall “suffice that the Bread such as is usual to be eaten: but the best and purest Wheat Bread that conveniently may be gotten.” This followed the change in 1552; in 1549 the directions were that the bread be “unleavened and round, as it was before, but without all manner of print, and something more larger and thicker than it was, so that it may be aptly divided in divers pieces” (spelling modernized). Elizabeth tried to insist on unleavened bread in 1559 but this met with much opposition and was unenforceable. Anglicans have from time to time argued for or against wafers and bread.

The canons of the Church of England now say: “The bread, whether leavened or unleavened, shall be of the best and purest wheat flower that conveniently may be gotten, and the wine the fermented juice of the grape, good and wholesome.”³ The present canon clearly reflects a number of historical discussions:

- firstly, conceding the push of the catholic revival to use unleavened bread; achieving what Elizabeth was unable to do;
- secondly, fending off the push of the Free Churches to use grape juice instead of wine.

This may seem to draw the issue to a close but there is one context where more rules apply. Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs) are designated areas of ecumenical cooperation where more than one denomination work together. I worked in one on a new housing estate where five denominations shared one building. There was a Roman Catholic congregation, a congregation of Brethren, and a “Shared Congregation” of Anglicans, Methodists, and

Reformed, where I was the Anglican priest and I shared in ministry to the congregation with a Reformed minister. Anglicans have quite complex rules for such situations, including one on the eucharistic elements: “Where a priest of the Church of England is presiding at a service of Holy Communion according to the rite of another Church . . . and there are conscientious objections from members of other Churches to alcoholic wine, at least real grape juice should be used, and fermented wine from which the alcohol has been removed is to be preferred.”⁴ This has been a contentious issue in some LEPs, and this tries to provide a sliding scale of priorities:

- real wine;
 - if there is objection, dealcoholized wine,
- or
- grape juice.

This scale brings me to another experience in my ministry, in the Church of Uganda.

Church of Uganda. From 1983–1985 I was the chaplain of Archbishop Janani Luwum Theological College in Northern Uganda. This was the post-Amin period, and the economy was devastated. It was clear that Uganda was once a prosperous country, but all that had now disappeared, ravaged by war. Part of my job was to purchase elements for the chapel. Bread was available, but it was a luxury item, and from a Ugandan perspective not a staple “daily bread” but something produced for an honored guest. A further problem with bread was that in the tropical climate it did not last very long. The Roman Catholic Church had plenty of wafers, which were sold at a reasonable price, and this was what we used in chapel. They were easy to get and lasted in the climate. On the few occasions when this was not possible biscuits were used.

Wine however was a big problem. Most of the time it was not available. Grapes do not grow in Uganda, and there is no tradition of drinking wine in the local culture. The only things in the shops were whiskey and ribena (concentrated blackcurrant juice). Wine when available was super-expensive—e.g., one bottle of wine cost the equivalent of three months’ collections in my local church. Most of the time we used ribena, but sometimes whiskey. Thus I was left with a different sliding scale to the Church of England. Do I select:

- whiskey, alcoholic, but pale in color, or
- ribena, non-alcoholic, but red in color?

Neither of them is related to the grape. History in Uganda showed that this was a problem for the church during most of its existence.

The peoples of Uganda do not grow grapes or wheat. Neither of these crops is native to the country, bananas being the staple in the south and millet in the north. These staples are eaten with a variety of vegetables. It is technically possible to grow both crops—you can, after all, ski on the equator in Uganda—but the reality is that they have to be imported.

The first missionaries walked across what is now Tanzania and were then paddled across Lake Victoria. They had all their provisions carried for them. In 1877 CMS missionaries arrived in Buganda. In 1895 Bishop Tucker arrived.⁵ He soon realized that the provision of communion wine was an issue. By January 1896 he had “provisionally” sanctioned the use of native wine

from the juice of bananas. It would appear that this continued off and on until the coming of the railway, and thus a reliable supply route. This was taken into account again in the Amin years, and with the economic collapse of the country banana wine was used by the church alongside other materials. Indeed, the Church of Uganda has a canon that says: "In absence of grape wine well-boiled banana juice wine or pineapple or passion fruit wine may be used, in consultation with the bishop" (2.13.3). Here is another sliding scale: if no grape wine, use fruit wines from local fruits.

International Anglican Agreement. A further dimension to the whole issue is the international statements that Anglicans have made. The Lambeth conference of 1888 resolved that one basis for reunion was "The Supper of the Lord—ministered with unfailing use of Christ's words of institution, and of the elements ordained by Him." This became a part of the Lambeth Quadrilateral, which gained sufficient authority for the Episcopal Church to include it in "Historical Documents" of *The Book of Common Prayer* (1979). It begs the question of the elements ordained by Christ, which we will come to later.

While the international Lambeth conferences kept agreeing on bread and wine as Christ instituted, we have already seen that local variations had begun to occur. Eventually this was acknowledged. The 1989 Inter Anglican Liturgical Consultation raised some questions: "Sacramental elements: here there are special problems, needing more work. Should wafer bread be as dominant as it needs to be—even to the point of being imported? Should local staple food and drink supervene? How far can variations be allowed?"⁶

The questions were raised but no answers were forthcoming. This was repeated in the Kanamai Statement of 1993, a regional meeting of African Anglicans: "We wish to encourage local people to produce the eucharistic bread and to ask the provinces to consider whether they should permit the use of local staple foods and drinks for the eucharistic elements, also carefully considering this alongside the biblical tradition."⁷ The 1995 Dublin Report was more cautious. Commenting directly on the above statement this Conference said: "This should be seen as a decision to be considered at the Provincial level rather than by individual congregations. Because the use of a different eucharistic species has implications for the worldwide Anglican Communion, before implementing such a decision Provinces are encouraged to consult the worldwide Communion through such bodies as the IALC, The Anglican Consultative Council, and the Lambeth Conference."⁸

A preliminary report on this⁹ shows much more variation than had been realized, and so the IALC was asked in 2002 to do further work on the eucharistic elements by ACC 12 which said that it "awaits a survey by the Inter Anglican Liturgical Consultation of practice in relation to the elements of Holy Communion in the churches of the Anglican Communion, and of the reasons given for any departure from dominical command" (resolution 16.1). The last phrase, "departure from dominical command," sounds rather heavy but still begs the question. This is work in progress and the potential tensions are hinted at in the text.

Eucharistic Symbols

You may by now be thinking that this is a tiresome discussion. One colleague in a group debate said that all these machinations were irrelevant; the Eucharist is about inclusion, and so you had to be pragmatic concerning the elements. Other people might say that it is only a symbol, and this discussion sounds like angels on pinheads. Such statements have implicit approaches to

eucharistic symbols and do not necessarily escape the issues. So some comments about symbolism may illuminate the discussion.

Many who study symbolism would want to say that they are highly important in conveying cultural meaning. Symbols condense the values and thoughts of a culture, and they are polysemic, they have more than one meaning. So they are more than “only a symbol.” To some students of symbols this is almost an oxymoron. Victor Turner,¹⁰ a Christian anthropologist, talked of the two poles of a symbol:

- one around the ideology,
- and one around the physical elements.

The two are connected. This is helpful as it illumines some of the issues around what to use for wine. Wine gathers around it a number of meanings:

- festal drink,
- Blood of Christ,
- Last Supper,
- Passover connection,
- eschatological judgment,
- gladdening the heart,
- shared cup.

To these might be added

- family food,
- local produce,

particularly where you grow your own. However in other parts of the world, where wine is not a staple or a local product, other meanings may attach to the symbol:

- luxury item,
- foreign drink,
- prohibited drink to neighbors (in Islamic regions),
- temptation to drunkenness.

Some of these meanings are supplied by the elements, others by the biblical tradition, and others by the local culture. These meanings may at time conflict with one another, and people’s arguments may draw on a number of these meanings at any one time. If some stress fidelity to what Jesus used at the Last Supper, clearly others, including my colleague, stress inclusion from the shared cup. Turner’s contribution to this debate is to show that these complex webs of meanings underlie our discourse on such matters. We implicitly rank these various meanings, and undertake debate based on our own rankings. This can even influence our use of the Bible.

Biblical traditions. Cyprian’s letter to Caecilius (*Ep.* 62),¹¹ written in 253, argues that we must do what Jesus did, and that deviation from this tradition is erroneous. This led to a debate centering on the narratives of institution in the Scriptures. More recent studies have widened

the scope of the discussion by looking at Jesus' meal traditions, some of which have eucharistic resonances, for example in the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. While *artos* is the word used for bread in this narrative, we find that in John (6:9) the feeding of the five thousand is with barley bread. Even more interestingly, Luke, mentioning the feast of unleavened bread (22:1), uses the word for unleavened bread, *azumos*, while in his last supper narrative (22:19) he uses *artos*. Luke contains the "cup, bread, cup" order; his is the only narrative with two cups (or it does if you follow the longer text; otherwise it has the "cup, bread" order, following the shorter version of the text, which omits verses 19b–20).

Paul Bradshaw uses this and much other evidence to suggest that there was diversity of practice both in the New Testament and the early church.¹² This includes the normal bread and cup, the agape with Eucharist, the cup bread tradition, and a bread and water tradition. Indeed, some of these variations in the text became the focus of a dispute between the Eastern and Western churches, with the East using leavened bread, arguing that *artos* is not *azumos*, and the West arguing that the Last Supper was a Passover meal and therefore must have used unleavened bread.¹³

Meanwhile, from a different ideological perspective there are still those today who argue for different meanings of the word "wine" in the Bible.¹⁴ Here the case is that the prohibitions on drunkenness and unethical use of wine require a distinction between grape juice and alcoholic wine. The argument is that grape juice, either fresh or boiled, was used at Jewish festivals, not fermented wine. This means that Jesus would not have used fermented wine at the Last Supper, and neither should we. This comes in part from the temperance tradition, but the case is also raised from other traditions. Some Muslims have argued that the prophet Jesus would not have used wine, as holy men do not drink alcohol.¹⁵ Clearly the picture is complex, and our ideological starting point, in this case support of the temperance movement (or Islam), is one factor in the hermeneutics of exegesis and historical study. Some in this camp note approvingly of the use of grapes or raisins in Oriental Churches as supporting their arguments, but dimensions to the practice of these churches widen the issues.

I was watching the deacon make the eucharistic bread in a Syrian Orthodox church in Kerala, South India. He took some dough from a tin, added more flour and water, and made small rolls, while putting some of the dough back. The rolls were then pressed onto a mold to produce a round cake about two inches in diameter. This was cooked over the censer, which incidentally had charcoal from the husks of surrounding coconut trees. The cakes were then used in the Eucharist. The key element in this process is the dough. A piece is always kept and used for the next Eucharist. It was explained to me that this was the "holy leaven," dough going back to the bread that Jesus used at the Last Supper. These traditions are also found in the Coptic Church, Ethiopian Orthodox Church, and the Church of the East.¹⁶ I do not buy the strict historical accuracy of this narrative, but it shows a different cultural agenda in the debate concerning the correct elements for the Eucharist. Here the important link is the physical connection between this Eucharist and Jesus in the dough.

The Roman Catholic Approach

Controversy over the elements, and particularly the bread in relation to celiac disease, is not confined to Anglicanism. This has caused a number of discussions in the Roman Catholic Church. The 1983 *Code of Canon Law*¹⁷ states:

Can. 924 §1. The most holy eucharistic sacrifice must be offered with bread and with wine in which a little water must be mixed. §2. The bread must be only wheat and recently made so that there is no danger of spoiling. §3. The wine must be natural from the fruit of the vine and not spoiled.

Can. 926. According to the ancient tradition of the Latin Church, the priest is to use unleavened bread in the eucharistic celebration whenever he offers it.

The bread therefore must be wheat bread and unleavened “according to ancient tradition.” The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*¹⁸ explains:

1412 The essential signs of the Eucharistic sacrament are wheat bread and grape wine, on which the blessing of the Holy Spirit is invoked and the priest pronounces the words of consecration spoken by Jesus during the Last Supper: “This is my body which will be given up for you. . . . This is the cup of my blood . . .”

The 1975 General Instruction of the Roman Missal¹⁹ adds some comments about the bread:

281. Following the example of Christ, the Church has always used bread and wine with water to celebrate the Lord’s Supper.

282. According to the tradition of the entire Church, the bread must be made from wheat; according to the tradition of the Latin Church, it must be unleavened.

283. The nature of the sign demands that the material for the eucharistic celebration truly have the appearance of food. Accordingly, even though unleavened and baked in the traditional shape, the eucharistic bread should be made in such a way that in a Mass with a congregation the priest is able actually to break the host into parts and distribute them to at least some of the faithful. (When, however, the number of communicants is large or other pastoral needs require it, small hosts are in no way ruled out.) The action of the breaking of the bread, the simple term for the eucharist in apostolic times, will more clearly bring out the force and meaning of the sign of the unity of all in the one bread and of their charity, since the one bread is being distributed among the members of one family.

284. The wine for the eucharist must be from the fruit of the vine (see Lk 22:18), natural, and pure, that is not mixed with any foreign substance.

This might seem to rule out any use of alternative elements. However, there is a certain amount of “reading in” to say that the Church has always used bread and wine mixed with water. Bradshaw (op. cit.) would argue that there were orthodox Christian groups using only water. The Instruction that the bread should have appearance of food also raises questions about wafers. Do they really look like food? Notice too that “the tradition of the Latin Church” is an interesting cultural linguistic self-designation.

This led to a rather definite directive from the then Cardinal Ratzinger, who in 1994 argued in relation to Celiac disease:

IB 1) Special hosts “*quibus glutinum ablatum est*” [that are gluten-free] are invalid matter for the celebration of the Eucharist.

2) Low-gluten hosts are valid matter, provided that they contain the amount of gluten sufficient to obtain the confection of bread, that there is no addition of foreign materials and that the procedure for making such hosts is not such as to alter the nature of the substance of the bread.

He also commented on the wine in the context of alcoholic priests:

II. B . . . the permission to use *mustum* can be granted by ordinaries to priests affected by alcoholism or other conditions which prevent the ingestion of even the smallest quantity of alcohol, after presentation of a medical certificate.

C. By “*mustum*” is understood fresh juice from grapes or juice preserved by suspending its fermentation (by means of freezing or other methods which do not alter its nature).

He thus concludes:

III. D. Given the centrality of the celebration of the Eucharist in the life of the priest, candidates for the priesthood who are affected by celiac disease or suffer from alcoholism or similar conditions may not be admitted to holy orders.²⁰

This all follows very logically from the definitions; it is a law-based approach that has defined bread and wine and which then regulates permitted variations from that essentialist definition, i.e. low-gluten bread (but not gluten free), and *mustum*, preserved grape juice, for the wine. Clearly my own practice does not follow the Roman Catholic approach.

Processes of Inculturation

There are therefore a variety of approaches to the “correct” bread and wine. The definitive statements of the Vatican have not stopped Catholics in places such as Africa, who are arguing for a change in the law, from pointing out that bread and wine are elements of a particular mediterranean culture.²¹ A number of different processes have been suggested for inculturation:

- adaptation;
- creative assimilation;
- pastoral sensitivity;
- dynamic equivalence.

Adaptation is the term used by the fathers of the Second Vatican Council in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.²² Examples of adaptation are using the vernacular, new musical traditions, preferring oil lamps to candles.

Creative assimilation is the bringing in of something from a culture to the liturgy. The Lutheran *Nairobi Statement* calls it “adding pertinent components of local culture to the liturgical ordo in order to enrich its core” (3.4).²³ Clear examples of this are the development of secondary

symbolism at baptism and the incorporation of vows into a marriage liturgy. Nowadays people usually think that vows are a central part of marriage, but it is clear that this is a later tradition, and that vows in marriage rites were an introduction in the West at the turn of the first millennium. Vows are still not a part of Eastern marriage rites.

Pastoral sensitivity drives me to use gluten-free wafers, and grape juice for alcoholics. For me the issue is not legislating for the clergy but consideration of the position of people within the eucharistic community.

Almost unnoticed, many of us are using *dynamic equivalence*. The Lutheran *Nairobi Statement* is again clear: “It involves re-expressing components of Christian worship with something from a local culture that has an equal meaning, value and function . . . it involves . . . enabling the meanings and actions of worship to be ‘encoded’ and re-expressed in the language of local culture” (3.2). I want to suggest that some of us do that Sunday by Sunday without even noticing.

In my local church we use wafers and wine. The wine is fortified to preserve it. This is very common in Anglican churches. Other places use leavened bread, often purchased from a local shop. The conscious element in the choice is churchmanship—wafers vs. “real bread”—and denominational identity—wine, not grape juice. A secondary reflection on the material used shows that wafers are hard to conceive as bread at all. Unleavened bread is now available in the shops, not least to be eaten with curry and large amounts of beer. Wafers bear little resemblance to this. What we do know is that at the last supper Jesus did not use round quasi-bread, nor did he use fortified wine. We do not even know that he mixed wine with water—even that is a later tradition. What we have unconsciously done is an adaptation by a process of dynamic equivalence, using what approximates and holds the equivalent meaning of bread and wine. If we can recognize that this is what we do, then perhaps we can begin to consider the position of others who live in contexts where bread and wine are not available.

Methodological considerations. A further problem that underlies the discussion is a problem of definition. When is something an adaptation, and is this the same as inculturation? Should the whole issue be incorporated into the debate about contextualization? It is a question of drawing your boxes, defining your categories. Maybe inculturation is the way liturgical studies have referred to issues having to do with cultural particularity, which other branches of theology have debated under the category of contextualization. A common language has yet to be developed.

Even within the scope of this article different methodological approaches to issues of the eucharistic species can be seen. These can be summarized as follows:

- Ideological: Jesus cannot have used wine because he was a good Muslim (Abdullah) or a holy person (Ostling). From my perspective a priori reasoning is being used in these arguments, in the reading of texts.
- Juridical: this can be seen in the approach of some Roman Catholics. From a definition of bread logical consequences are developed. The danger I see here is the increasing *reductio ad absurdum* over how much gluten can be left out before it ceases to be bread.
- Symbolical: this can be seen in the Lutheran Nairobi Statement and its comments on dynamic equivalence. A problem would seem to be that you can never replace something with something else of equal meaning, and you are always left with a

judgment whether the fit is close enough. The situation is complex, with competing methodologies, hence the variety of approaches in the different churches. So what does the liturgical practitioner do on Sunday?

Back to my local church. I began this discussion in my local church with the gluten-free wafer. There never was much of a conscious decision about using this wafer; indeed it was something I inherited, and I continued the tradition. It was only when the question was raised in an inter-Anglican context that I began to question what had happened. I suspect that inculturation by dynamic equivalence, or assimilation, is very much like that. It happens almost without our noticing it. As to the Roman Catholic approach, I am not sure that they will escape this either. Indeed, the adoption of wafers in the West may well be “a more radical adaptation” for all sorts of reasons that are now forgotten. Jesus took bread and a cup and gave thanks. Christians today have to work out how this should be done in their own cultural context. They do not all agree.

ENDNOTES

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3. *The Canons of the Church of England*, 6th ed. (London: CHP, 2000), B17.2.
4. General Synod of the Church of England, *Ecumenical Relations Canons B 43 and B 44: Code of Practice* (London: General Synod, 1987), 21.
5. A. P. Shepherd, *Tucker of Uganda: Artist and Apostle* (London: SCM, 1929).
6. D. R. Holeton, ed., *Liturgical Inculturation in the Anglican Communion*. JLS 15 (Bramcote: Grove Books, 1990), 11.
7. D. Gitari, ed., *Liturgical Inculturation in Africa: The Kanamai Statement “African Culture and Anglican Liturgy.”* JLS 28 (Nottingham: Grove Books, 1994), 41.
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9. P. Gibson, *International Anglican Liturgical Consultations: Minutes from Berkeley 2001*, <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/documents/liturgy/ialc2001minutes.html#navmap>, (accessed 03/02), 2001.
10. See V. Turner and E. Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978).
11. Cyprian, “To Caecilius, on the Sacrament and the Cup of the Lord,” trans. Ernest Wallis, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 5:358-64.
12. See P. Bradshaw, *Eucharistic Origins* (London: SPCK, 2004).

13. See B. D. Woolley, *The Bread of the Eucharist* (London: Mowbrays, 1913).
14. R. Ostling, *Should Wine, Grape Juice or Water Be Consumed at Communion?* http://www.news-star.com/stories/060102/rel_1.shtml (accessed 10/04), 2002.
15. O. Abdullah, "If Jesus was Muslim as Muslims claim, then why did he convert water into wine in one case, and said that wine is his blood in another since wine and alcohol are prohibited in Islam?" <http://www.answering-christianity.com/que18.htm> (accessed, 10/04), n.d.
16. See E. S. Drower, *Water into Wine* (London: John Murray, 1956).
17. http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/___P3A.HTM (accessed 10/04).
18. <http://www.vatican.va/archive/catechism/p2s2c1a3.htm#VII> (accessed 10/04).
19. <http://www.ewtn.com/library/CURIA/GIRM.HTM#2> (accessed 10/04).
20. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Norms for Use of Low-gluten Bread and Mustum*, http://www.adoremus.org/CDF_Lowgluten-mustum94.html (accessed 10/04), 1994.
21. See E. E. Uzukwu, "Food and Drink in Africa and the Christian Eucharist," *AFER* 72 (1980): 370–85; E. A. Ruch, "Food and Drink in the Eucharist [a response to Uzukwu]," *AFER* 73, (1981): 179–81.
22. http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html (accessed 06/04), 1963.
23. The Lutheran World Federation, *Nairobi Statement*, http://www.worship.ca/docs/lwf_ns.html (accessed 06/04), 1996.

Dr. Phillip Tovey is an Anglican priest, director of reader training for the Diocese of Oxford, and liturgy lecturer at Ripon College, Cuddesdon. He is also program director for a Masters in Ministry. He has degrees from the University of London, University of Nottingham, and Oxford Brookes University. He ministered for twelve years in parishes in the Diocese of Oxford, and worked for two years for the Diocese of Northern Uganda. He has published numerous articles and monographs on liturgy and worship. His last book was Inculturation of Christian Worship, published by Ashgate.