A MENNONITE APPRECIATION OF THE EUCHARISTIC THEOLOGY OF THE EASTERN ORTHODOX TRADITION

Practicing "Holy Envy"

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Abstract

Ecumenism has been flooded with scholarly papers, heady discussions, and sophisticated documents. In my view, an alternative of doing ecumenism which touches people in the pews is needed. I propose that ecumenical relations can begin to do so by applying the concept of "holy envy," a phrase coined by Krister Stendahl. How can I, a Mennonite, have such a "holy envy" to the Eastern Orthodox tradition? How can I see the beauty in that tradition? How do I desire to see it incorporated into the life of my church? My response to these questions is to focus on the eucharistic theology of the Eastern Church, by which the church is formed around and by the sacred meal. I hope that other Protestant sisters and brothers might apply this method to their respective traditions.

Keywords: holy envy, Orthodox, Mennonite, worship, eucharist, ecumenism.

Abstrak

Ekumenisme telah dibanjiri dengan makalah-makalah kesarjanaan, diskusi-diskusi intelektual dan dokumen-dokumen canggih. Dalam pandangan saya, sebuah alternatif untuk melakukan ekumenisme yang menyentuh kaum awam dibutuhkan. Di sini saya menawarkan bahwa

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jalinan ekumenikal dapat dimulai dengan menerapkan "iri kudus," frase yang dicetuskan oleh Krister Stendahl. Bagaimana saya, seorang Mennonit memiliki "iri kudus" yang demikian terhadap tradisi Ortodoks Timur? Bagaimana saya melihat keindahan di dalam tradisi tersebut? Bagaimana saya mendambakannya menjadi bagian dari kehidupan gereja saya? Di sini saya memfokuskan pada teologi Gereja Timur, yang percaya bahwa gereja dibentuk oleh perjamuan kudus itu. Saya berharap, saudari dan saudara dari tradisi Protestan lainnya pun dapat menerapkannya pada tradisi masing-masing.

Kata-kata kunci: iri kudus, Ortodoks, Mennonite, ibadah, ekaristi, ekumenisme.

Introduction

This article is a brief inquiry into the theology of the sacred meal in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, followed by my appreciation as a theologian from a Mennonite tradition.[1] I first heard about "holy envy" in the course on Theology in an Ecumenical Context (Spring Quarter 2013). Michael Kinnamon, former general secretary of the National Council of Churches in the USA, then teaching in the School of Theology and Ministry at Seattle University, asked the students: "What do you envy in other traditions that you wish your own [tradition] had? How might Christians claim what others have, knowing that we are impoverished without the gifts which others have?"[2] Later I learned that the phrase was coined by Krister Stendahl, a former professor of New Testament studies at Harvard Divinity School and a former bishop of Stockholm, Sweden. He first mentioned it during a press conference in Stockholm, in 1985, when he was speaking about seeing beauty in other religious traditions. He suggested asking: "what is beautiful" in my neighbor's faith which differs from mine? (Trice, 2014). For Stendahl, there are three rules for understanding other faiths: (1) allowing others to define themselves (or, listen more to the adherents of a religion than to its enemies); (2) comparing the best of one's tradition with the best of theirs; and (3) leaving room for holy envy—recognizing elements in another tradition that one admires and would like to see have greater scope in one's own religious community.

In this article, I shall not go as far as to explore interreligious relations, as Stendahl suggested. Rather, I shall briefly sketch the theology of the eucharist in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, and describe how I, a Christian raised in a Peace Church tradition, experience "holy envy" toward the eucharistic theology of the Eastern Church.[3] I believe that such a question is important to be asked today, since there will no *Una Sancta*, One Holy [Church], if churches do not come to experience that "holy envy." For Kinnamon (2014), there are at least four obvious benefits from practicing holy envy:

(1) The teachings and practices of another faith [tradition] can truly enrich our religious life.
(2) The idea of holy envy reminds us that all human attempts to know the Divine are finally partial, in need of the witness of others.
(3) If we approach interfaith [or interdenominational] relationships intent on looking for things to appreciate, with an eye toward holy envy—then we are less likely to be defensive toward, or merely tolerant of, the other.
(4) The idea of holy envy can help us see our own gifts with new appreciation—or, to say it another way, can remind us of who we are at our best.

I hope this article may provide a perspective for sisters and brothers of any tradition concerning the practice of holy envy.

Recalling the response of the Orthodox Church in America to the *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*,[4] this article touches upon three points: theology, identity and mission. Theologically, the eucharist is a manifestation of the Kingdom of God which Jesus carried into the world, and "made powerfully accessible by the Holy Spirit whom he sends from the Father to those who believe in him as Messiah and Lord." Ecclesiologically, the eucharist contributes to the identity of the church as an actualizing unity, expressing her apostolic faith, manifesting her catholicity, and giving her holiness, thereby echoing the Apostle's Creed of "one, holy, and catholic church." With regard to mission, the eucharist invigorates the theological vision of the church and empowers her evangelical mission, through the nurturing and renewing of the spiritual life of the people (Thurian, 1987a: 18).[5]

The Early Church: A Community Centered around a Meal

Alan Kreider, a Mennonite historian, points out that worship in early Christianity was not aimed at attracting people to attend public gatherings. Worship, rather, was a character-renewal experience with God. He writes:

> Christian worship was designed to enable Christians to worship God. It was not designed to attract non-Christians; it was not "seeker-sensitive." For seekers were not allowed in . . . Christian worship . . . assisted in the outreach of the churches indirectly, as a by-product, by shaping the lives and character of individual Christians and their communities so that they would be intriguing (Kreider, 1999: 14).

How did worship shape the life and character of those early Christians? At the heart of the early Christian gathering to praise God, there was a sharing of meals. Biblical scholar and historian Robert Jewett opines that, in the Roman empire era, early Christian converts had two kinds of common meals: the "patronal share-meals in house churches" and "communal share-meals in lodging churches." About 90 percent lived in apartment blocks called *insulae*. In each apartment block at the upper level of the four—and five—story *insulae*, there were cubicles each of about 10 square meters, presumably space for one family. Christian groups met in those small cubicles and brought whatever they could to the common meal. This "eucharist" was carried out at least once a week (see Crossan, 1998: 428–429).

In a study on the meaning of meal in the early church, biblical scholar Hal Taussig argues that the notion of "*basileia* of God" has a close affinity with meal. The *basileia* of God signifies a mass of people called into being by God. Earliest Christians talked about almost every aspect of the Kingdom of God at meals because "the *symposion* part of the meal was a time for all kinds of discussions, songs, and drinking, early 'Christians' as well as the historical Jesus himself—like the rest of their culture—used it for serious reflection, playful imagination, and enthusiastic affirmation" (Taussig, 2009: 178). Taussig asserts that, since many leaders of the early church were illiterate, the *symposia* became the main arena—though not the only one—where Christians did theologizing. Theology developed and was developed at the table.

During meals, the apostles and other Christians found themselves often sharing themes of the church, especially the church's unity. Paul, for instance, linked his teaching on church unity with what people ate (Rom. 14–15), what people wore at supper time (1 Cor. 11:4–12), and with whom Christians had their meals (Gal. 11–14). For Paul, the meal shaped his thinking about how Jews, gentiles, men, and women were united "in Christ." (Taussig, 2009: 179). The meal, therefore, helped make unity one of the essential elements in the identity-formation of earliest Christianity. In this, early Christian worship, indeed, was not "seeker-sensitive."

The Orthodox Church: Inheritor of the Meal Tradition

The Eastern Orthodox Church, spread throughout eastern Europe, Russia, and along the coastal area of the eastern Mediterranean, and claiming itself the inheritor and keeper of the holy tradition of the apostles of Christ, affirms the centrality of the meal. When Orthodox Christians share the meal, they spontaneously sense themselves to be in heaven. In other words, the reality of the Kingdom of God is present there among the worshipping community; Christ, though his body is in heaven, is in communion with the congregation as the eucharistic elements of the body and blood of Christ are shared, as the Gospel read aloud, and as the prayers of the people said or sung. "The whole life of the community," writes John Meyendorff, "was centered around the celebration of the Eucharist" (Meyendorff, 1996: 11). Alexander Schmemann writes also, "The eucharist . . . is . . . the very manifestation and fulfillment of the Church in all her power, sanctity and fullness" (Schmemann, 2003: 24).

First, the theology of the eucharist. A key to understanding the theology on which is based the eucharistic meal is found in the Eucharistic Prayer, or the Preface:[6]

> It is fitting and right to hymn you, [to bless you, to praise you] to give thanks to, to worship you in all places of your dominion. For you are God, ineffable, inconceivable, invisible, incomprehensible, existing always and in the same way, you and your only-begotten Son and your Holy Spirit. You brought us out of not-being to being; and when we had fallen, you raised us up again; and did not cease to do everything until you had brought us up to heaven, and granted us the kingdom that is to come. For all these things we give thanks to you and to your only-begotten Son and

> to your Holy Spirit, for all that we know and do not know, your seen and unseen benefits that have come upon us. We give you thanks also for this ministry; vouchsafe to receive it from our hands, even though thousands of archangels and ten thousands of angels stand before you, cherubim and seraphim, with six wings and many eyes, flying on high... (Thurian and Wainwright, 1983: 117; cf. Schmemann, 1982: 38).

These lines bring together so much of importance: theology proper, anthropology, hamartology, soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. Three major themes will be highlighted here: the identity of God, the identity of the church, and the mission of the people of God.

1. The Identity of God

The divine identity is to be found in the holy Trinity which is central to the Eastern Orthodox faith. The *anaphora* describes God as "you and your only-begotten Son and your Holy Spirit." God as one means a union and not only a unit, a community and not only a unity. This union is the supreme expression of personhood and love. According to Kallistos Ware, to say "God is personal" means that, in God, there is perfect relationship, beyond human comparison and imagination. To say "God is love" means that, in God, there is never a solitary affection. God is three persons in the relationship of love from all eternity, "each of whom 'dwells' in the other two by virtue of a perpetual movement of love" (Ware, 1997: 209). This threefold relationship in the divine life is called *perichoresis*, "co-inherence," or "mutual inhabiting." Hence, there is a dynamism or a flowing movement—a movement that reaches beyond the divine self—and whoever takes part in this divine reality will find newness.

Human beings share the mystery of divine *perichoresis* by being "taken up into the circles of love that exists within God," suggest theologian Kallistos Ware (1995: 28). The eucharist is God-at-work, an arena where the divine love for humans becomes most apparent. It is an "epiphany" or manifestation of God-self to humans in order to bring them to the heavenly reality. Gennadios Limouris coined the phrase "trinitarian existentiality" to depict divine reaching-out to humans; the eucharist enacted "in the Spirit through the Son is a theocentric movement which carries us upwards towards the unfathomable abyss of the Father" (Limouris, 1994: 251). In the eucharist, the faithful believers become partakers of the life of the

triune existentiality, a life which expresses immeasurable bountifulness for the whole of humanity and the rest of creation.

Anaphora itself means "a lifting-up," or "ascension." The work of God results in the "divinization" or "deification" of believers—a *theosis* (cf. 2 Pet. 1:14). As the focal point of the eucharist is Jesus Christ, therefore, in the eucharist, Christians recall the words of Jesus in John 6:57, "Whoever eats me will live because of me." The work of God in Christ assures reconciliation, forgiveness, and new life, since Christ reconciled humans to God through his death and resurrection. Humans who "had fallen," were "raised again" by God, and "brought . . . to heaven" even "granted . . . the kingdom to come"—an echo of post-apostolic teaching in Ephesians 2:4-7 and 1:10. By being partakers of the divine food in the power of the Holy Spirit, the Christians taste and see the goodness of God through the reconciliation obtained by Jesus Christ.

The *anaphora* then truly becomes a preface of future reality. In celebrating the eucharist, the future is drawn into the present. It is not simply a sign or a foretaste of the future kingdom; but it is truly the meal of the kingdom. The sacred meal is no other than the gate to the eternal home, for God has "granted us the kingdom that is to come," thus says the Eucharistic Prayer. "It is the door into the Kingdom," writes Schmemann. "This future has been given to us in the past that it may constitute the very *present*, the life itself, now, of the Church" (Schmemann, 1982: 39), to whose identity we now turn.

2. The Identity of the Church

The Orthodox tradition believes that the church is the eucharistic community. As Limouris suggests, "The eucharist is not a sacrament *in the church* but is the sacrament *of the church* itself; it constitutes, manifests and expresses the essence of the church" (Limouris, 1994: 249), and "the church herself in her eucharistic being and life, is indeed thanksgiving to God . . . ." (Thurian [ed.], 1987a: 18). The second person of the Trinity is the "Eucharist of Christ and Christ the Eucharist" (Schmemann), so it is true that the eucharist is the church and the church is the eucharist. In the words of Schmemann:

> The church is not an organization but the new people of God. The church is not a religious cult but a liturgy, embracing the entire creation of God. The Church is not a doctrine about the world to come but the

> joyous encounter of the kingdom of God. It is the sacrament of peace, the sacrament of salvation and the sacrament of the reign of Christ (Schmemann, 2003: 24).

The gathered community ascends to the sanctuary of bliss where Christ has ascended, by partaking of the body and blood of the Lord. On the one hand, this act is truly a memorial enactment of all the perfect works of God in Christ (*anamnesis*); but, on the other hand, it is also an anticipation of the reality yet to be accomplished (*prolepsis*) through the invoking of the Holy Spirit (*epiklesis*). This ascension and communion with Christ takes place when the priest invokes the Holy Spirit upon the church and the offering of bread and wine, so *both* the church and the elements are transformed (*metabole*) and become the true body of Christ.

As a corporate body centered in the sacred meal, the church also celebrate the eucharist in the common work of the people of God. The eucharist is always interwoven with *leitourgia*, "liturgy," a corporate action which transforms all the participants into one body—not a unity of parts, but the whole communion. "The Church, gathered in the eucharist," Alexander Schmemann wrote, "even when limited to 'to or three,' is the image and realization of the body of Christ, and only those who are gathered will be able to partake, i.e., be communicants the body and blood of Christ, because they manifest him by their very assembly" (Schmemann, 2003: 24). On the question of the frequency, the eucharist is not "a private affair" of the priests, but "as an act involving the whole church" (Meyendorff, 1996: 62). Thus, the Orthodox Church commonly celebrates the eucharist on Sundays and special days.

Being identified with the eucharist, the Orthodox Church does not share the sacred meal with other churches. Orthodox Christians believe themselves to be "one, holy, catholic and apostolic" church, yet they long for the reunion of the churches. This reunion must be preceded by full agreement on all matters of faith. True communion is achieved when there is unanimity in faith. Until Christians "return to the faith of the Fathers and the Apostles" (Meyendorff), the Orthodox cannot share the sacrament with any other churches. The Eastern Orthodox believe that the eucharist is not a "sign" but the reality of the kingdom feast. Celebration of eucharist with other churches can happen only as "the consequence and crown of a unity already attained" (Ware, 1997: 310; cf. Thurian, 1987b: 7; 1987a: 20).[7] In order to move towards fullness, theologians as

individuals may participate in dialogues on church unity, not the Orthodox Church as a whole. These individuals, even in their weakness, may guide other Christians in the right way towards unity, while also learning how to nurture the ministerial gifts which are theirs as members of the One Church (Meyendorff, 1996: 201).

3. The Mission of the Church

At the Roman Catholic Mass, the priest says, "*Ite, missa est!*" ("Go, the mass is made!"), but in Eastern eucharist, the proclamation is simply, "Let us depart in peace, in the name of the Lord!" After humans have ascended into God's presence and been transfigured as was Jesus on Mount Tabor, there must follow more than these words express. The eucharistic liturgy, "the liturgy within the Liturgy" as the climax of the community's life, is prolonged by "the liturgy after the Liturgy," so Ion Bria asserts (Bria, 1983: 213–218). This is so because, in the aforementioned words of Schmemann, the church is "embracing the entire creation of God." Next, "And thus: *the world, the Church, the kingdom*. All of God's creation, all salvation, all fulfillment. Heaven on earth . . . This is what we are summoned to behold, to recognize, to perceive each time the eucharist is celebrated" (Schmemann, 2003: 239–240).

This reminds the congregants not to be escapists from the world, but to realize that "the *cosmos* is becoming *ecclesia*." In celebrating the eucharist, the people of God glimpse the fullness of creation, of what the future might hold. In the words of Schmemann:

> She is priestly in her relationship to herself for her life is to offer herself to God, and she is priestly in her relationship to the world, for her mission is to offer the world to God and thus to sanctify it. "Thine own of Thine own we offer unto Thee on behalf of all and for all." If this offering stands at the very heart of the Eucharist, the sacrament in which the Church always becomes "that which she is," it is because it expresses and fulfills the whole life of the Church, the very essence of man's vocation and calling in the world (Schmemann, 1997: 97).

The eucharistic liturgy, thus, transfigures Christians with radiating and transforming power, and then commissions them into the world to restore human dignity and to build a true *koinonia* of love and peace among humans and with the rest of creation. Ascension and transfiguration through

the eucharist imply philanthropic service to wider society, willingness to self-sacrifice for the sake of others, sharing of possessions and liberating responses to all kinds of oppression.

A Mennonite Appreciation

"Holy envy" is a way to see the beauty of other traditions. To do so, one should acknowledge one's own tradition with respect, but also with awareness about its incompleteness. Then, one first moves to knowing the differences with other traditions and, secondly, with a deep sense of appreciation, to feeling the desire to see them incorporated someday into the practice of one's own church. In short, there occurs a sense of identity, of appreciation of differences, and of the affirmation of that beauty as one's own.

For Mennonites, the church gathers as a visible community of believers and not as a sacramental body. In other words, the center of ecclesiology in Mennonite tradition is not eucharist. As part of a bigger family of Anabaptism, the Mennonites seek to revive the New Testament church. For us, the NT church is the norm. The church which the Mennonites believe is not a rigidly institutional church, but one with a dynamic fellowship of those who have experienced the salvific love of God through divine election. Menno Simons wrote, "Even as Abraham and the children of the Israelites, the female as well as the male, the male as well as the female, were not in covenant through the sign [sacraments] but through election, so also our children are in the covenant of God . . . ." (Dyck, 1995: 177–178).

The Mennonite tradition agrees that the Lord's Supper is an *anamnesis*, an act of remembrance of the death and the resurrection of Jesus. The Mennonites concur that the common meal is carried out as a thanksgiving (*eucharistia*) for God's bountiful works in the past and the present. The Mennonites also accept that the sacred meal represents the presence of the risen Christ in his Body, the church. Together with all churches, the church once called "the left wing of the Reformation" longs for the great joy of the eternal banquet in the kingdom which is to come. Yet, this tradition contends that the meal is a sign of the broken body and the shed blood of Christ; the elements do not change mystically to become the real body and blood of the ascended Christ. The primary

purpose of the Lord's Supper is to "renew our covenant with God and with each other"; so that, in partaking in the bread and wine, we "recommit ourselves to the way of the cross." As often as we celebrate the Lord's Supper in this manner, we are reminded to keep our bond with all the faithful and to live at peace with God and with all of creation. This is to live as disciples of Jesus, as the Lord's Supper has inspired us to do (see Mennonite Church, 1995: 50–52; 1963).

The basic character of Mennonite worship is simplicity. Mennonites believe that Christian life is shaped in such profound ways through worship, but worship can take place without the Lord's Supper. In the description of Mennonite theologian John Rempel, "Christian worship is corporate in its very essence: the fullness of the Spirit falls upon the gathered community; the fullness of the Word is heard here. In [worship], the broken bones of the body of Christ are reset and restored to health" (Rempel, 1998). There is no reference to the vitality of the eucharist in worship. The so called "Five Rythms in Worship" also makes no reference of the eucharist: (1) worship is a response to a loving God known as Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, (2) worship is rooted in, and shaped by, the Scripture, (3) worship creates a new community, uniting believers as be the body of Christ, (4) worship forms the people to be followers of Jesus, (5) worship and life is intimately interconnected. Simplicity in worship need not lack theological integrity.

The eucharist, or the Lord's Supper is not only simple in the Mennonite tradition, but also relates discipleship and suffering as the logical consequence of following Christ. In 1528, Hans Shlaffer wrote:

> Here we see that eating and drinking is something else (than is lived in the world). It lies in suffering, persecution, and being killed for the Lord's sake, as Scripture testifies everywhere of the blessed . . . Thus we eat his flesh, into death and pour out our blood for his name's sake, his words and commands (in things both small and great) (Dyck, 1995: 205).

It is not necessary that the Mennonite Church adopt all the sacramental theology in the Eastern Church. However, the Mennonite should consider what is lacking in its worship and, with a sense of "holy envy," as Michael Kinnamon said above, learn from the Eastern Orthodox. In Mennonite worship, first, a vision of the work of God in the past, present and future should be clearly conveyed in the liturgy. The Eastern Church worship expresses the work of God through *anamnesis*, *prolepsis* and

epiklesis. Second, in worship, the gathered people should feel acted upon by God. Conformity to the likeness of Christ should not only grow in daily discipleship but also in worship. For the Orthodox, the triune God, in communion with the worshipping community, takes them to heaven and makes them to share in the divine realms. Third, Mennonite worship should dig more deeply into the theological nexus between worship and the mission of the people of God. In Orthodox liturgy, the worshipping community realizes that they are ascended into heaven, been transfigured, and given privilege of communing with the living Lord, but then have returned to the world in order to give of themselves as living witnesses for the restoration of the broken creation.

Finally, I personally look forward to the integration of the Lord's Supper as one of the main elements of Mennonite worship. For Mennonites, I contend that discipleship develops from worship, a worship which incorporates the sacred meal in it. This is not a matter of sacramentology, nor is it simply an attempt to obtain a psychological impact from worship. Rather, it is a part of identity formation, one theological impact from participation in *symposia* focused on the *basilea* of God, just as for the historical Jesus and for his followers.

Conclusion

In those scholarly debates and academic discussions which often flood ecumenism, matters of doctrine are frequently central. Lay people may feel left behind in such heady works. On the path to the unity of the church, in my opinion, among the first steps should be the one of cultivating "holy envy." To take that step, one should ask: What do I have? What do others have? How can my own be enriched by affirming those of others?

In this article, I have looked at the Easter Orthodox tradition toward which I feel "holy envy." The eucharist is central in her life and liturgy. For the Orthodox, the church *does not* make the meals, but it is the meals which make the church. The church is gathered around the sacred meals. The meals also increase the sense of the identity and the mission of the church, as they are a foretaste of the fullness of creation. Every time they eat and drink from the table, Christians are foretasting and seeing how the

whole world will be embraced by Christ, as they are now embraced by Christ.

The Mennonites, a movement born in the context of the European Reformation, do not have such an understanding. For Mennonites, the church is the visible fellowship of Jesus' followers, and the eucharist is not as important as Christian values and discipleship. In this article, I have not been calling on the Mennonites to embrace the eucharistic theology of the Eastern Church. Rather, I have been asking how the meal might contribute to the formation of the identity and mission of the church. As I end this article, I am left with a sense of "holy envy"!

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Catatan Akhir

[1] On my social location, I was raised and nurtured at Gereja Kristen Muria Indonesia Kudus (GKMI Kudus) in the town of Kudus, Central Java, Indonesia, the oldest church in the GKMI Conference. For historical background of the conference see Lawrence M. Yoder (2006). Since there is no written document on theology of worship and communion in my conference, however, here I make use of thoughts of North American Mennonite theologians which support the theological view of GKMI.

[2] YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3vMW2aRtN9Y.

[3] Among the Catholics, there is another way of acknowledging other traditions called "receptive ecumenism." The idea originally came from Cardinal Walter Casper, President Emeritus of Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, and British scholar Paul D. Murray is one of its proponents. The discussion around receptive ecumenism is beyond the scope of this article, but I suggest to read Paul D. Murray, ed. (2010).

[4] The World Council of Churches' BEM document is available online. Accessed 10 May 2013, http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/faith-and-order-commission/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/baptism-eucharist-and-ministry-faith-and-order-paper-no-111-the-lima-text.

[5] Due to space limit, I shall not mention the visual and dramatic dimensions of Orthodox worship. I will, rather, focus on the Orthodox theology of Eucharist.

[6] The great Eastern theologian Alexander Schmemann regrets that theologians often neglected the Preface in developing eucharistic theology (see Schmemann, 1982: 38; cf. Ware, 1997: 282).

[7] The Orthodox will object to the use of "sign" by Ted Campbell: "the Eucharist to be *sign* of full 'communion' . . ." (Campbell, 1996: 61).