

Eucharist, Postcolonial Theory and Developmental Disabilities: A Practical Theologian Revisits the Jesus Table

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Introduction

As a practical theologian whose primary *métier* has been liturgics, I have long believed that practical theology provides the most appropriate constellation of methods available for exploring the dynamics of Christian worship in general and Roman Catholic liturgy in particular.¹ This optimistic perspective on the fecundity of that dialogue, however, may be based on a somewhat narrow, even modernistic set of practical theological presuppositions, e.g., the use of a correlational method which some have labeled “bourgeois.”² Thus the question arises for me: If Roman Catholic liturgy is pressed into conversation with practical theology through a decidedly non-modernistic lens (e.g., postcolonial theory), is there anything to be gained?

According to Susan Abraham,³ as this critical theory engages a dialogue partner such as theology, it has the propensity to produce “an oppositional discourse that challenges theological method in the Western academy.”⁴ At the same time Abraham contends that in its constructive mode,

1 See my vice-presidential address to the North American Academy of Liturgy, published as Academy Membership: A Case Study in Liturgical Methodology, in: *Proceedings of the North American Academy of Liturgy* 1997, 3–16.

2 Rebecca Chopp, *Practical Theology and Liberation*, in: *Formation and Reflection: The Promise of Practical Theology*, ed. Lewis S. Mudge and James N. Poling, Philadelphia (Fortress Press) 1987, 121.

3 I am especially grateful to Dr. Abraham for introducing me to postcolonial theory, and parallel literature which undergirds much of this article.

4 Susan Abraham, *What does Mumbai have to do with Rome? Postcolonial Perspectives on Globalization and Theology*, *Theological Studies* 69 (2008), 377.

the postcolonial context remains a contested but radically creative site for the continuing reimagination of political, religious and cultural communities. In particular, theological imagination in the postcolonial context is characterized by a marked distance from doctrinaire positions on identity, ethics, and liberation. In its stead emerge the heterogeneity of multiple (sometimes contrasting and contradictory) positions that remain an opportunity for creative envisioning.⁵

There is little question that liturgy in the Roman Catholic Church is already the scene of much oppositional discourse, and the last thing needed is more heterophany in this much contested foundation of faith and theology. At the same time, I am convinced that if practical theology provides a valid frame for examining the liturgical enterprise, and if postcolonial theory is a promising conversation partner for practical theology, then postcolonial theory at least needs to be tested in a dialogue with liturgics in order to discover if something promising might result from this engagement. Furthermore, I am concerned about the easy stagnation of liturgical studies and its facile alliances with some of the more innocuous aspects of contemporary methods in practical theology (e.g., attending to experience). Thus, I am interested in exploring promising critical theories that might shed new light both on practical theology as well as the liturgical arena examined through a practical theological lens.

There is some danger in this exploration for myself, who could more easily be identified with the colonizer than the colonized, while recognizing the danger of even that unsustainable binary.⁶ I am a middle aged, Caucasian, ordained male with a privileged educational background, belonging to a global religious congregation with significant political and financial resources. In many respects, I embody virtually every “majority” in Roman Catholicism: a position which is no source of pride for me, though one of admitted comfort. Furthermore, I have no interest in alienating members of my faith community or the leaders of that community whom I have spent considerable energies over the past three decades attempting to influence, especially on issues liturgical.

At the same time, I have some personal, ecclesial and professional resonance with certain aspects of postcolonial theory. As a member of an order of “friars minor” who emphasize not only minority but itineracy, I believe it a vocational responsibility to attune myself to voices and experiences of subalternity.⁷ Furthermore, my twenty-five years of teaching at Catholic

5 Ibid., 378.

6 Ilan Kapoor, *Participatory development, complicity and desire*, *Third World Quarterly* 26,8 (2005): 1203–1220.

7 Reliant on the exposition of hybridity in Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Cambridge, Mass. (Harvard University Press) 1993, I made this point to the VIIth Plenary Council of the Capuchin Order at Assisi in 2004, subsequently published as: *A Capuchin Contribution to the Church's Understanding of Priesthood: An Analogical Consideration of Biculturalism and Double Religious Belonging*, *Analecta Ordinis Fratrum Minorum Capuccinorum* 120 (2004), 558–572.

Theological Union, where the classroom continues to be an experience of the “world church,” I feel some responsibility for not only understanding but also developing some empathy for postcolonial theories that speak to the experiences of so many of our students.

Time and Place

According to Abraham, two preoccupations of the postcolonial mind set are “place” and “time” because of their influence on the construction of meaning and identity. These preoccupations are well exemplified in many of the novels that have been the focus of so much postcolonial literary criticism.⁸ This concern has great consonance with postmodern sacramental theology that eschews any liturgical or sacramental abstraction of time and place, and instead underscores the essential historicity of all liturgical/sacramental events. As Kenan Osborne summarizes,

...baptism is not a replication, a verbal phrase emphasizing an action, nor is a baptism a replicated clone, a substantive phrase emphasizing a thing. Each baptism is not a duplication of a rote activity, nor is each baptism the enfleshing of a duplicative reality. Rather, each baptism is an existential event, an existential action, an existential *Ereignis*. Each baptism is an individualized, historically discrete, temporally unrepeatable moment in the life of an individual, of a particular community of Christians, and of the temporal-historical presence of an active God. There is no such thing as generic baptism....⁹

Deciding what liturgical event in some particular time and place to consider through a postcolonial lens is thus the first challenge. There are many contemporary liturgical events that are digitally well documented¹⁰ and could serve as the basis of this analysis. On the other hand, literary analysis is one of the most well accepted postcolonial methods, and might serve this written medium more effectively. While there are many well documented liturgical texts that could be the source of this analysis, it makes sense to go to the heart of the tradition with some foundational text with the authority to speak to contemporary praxis. This dialogue with tradition is a classical characteristic of practical theology.¹¹

8 For example, Salman Rushdie's 1981 novel, *Midnight's Children*. On postcolonial literary theory, see: Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*, New York (Columbia University) 1998, 141–166.

9 Kenan Osborne, *Christian Sacraments in a Postmodern World: A Theology for the Third Millennium*, Mahwah, N.J. (Paulist Press) 1999, 58.

10 For example, there are well over 120 digital recordings of the Papal Masses celebrated by Benedict XVI at Yankee Stadium available on the Internet.

11 Don Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals*, Philadelphia (Fortress) 1991, 49.

We could consider official liturgical texts of the Roman Catholic church, which are celebrated as the church's *theologia prima*. The *locus classicus* of this notion is the maxim of Prosper of Aquitaine, *legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi*.¹² The problem with considering some official liturgical text (e.g., the Roman Catholic *Ordo Missae*) is that such is necessarily promulgated as a liturgical abstraction, not wed to any time and place, and is missing the *Ereignis* and *haecceitas* that a theologian like Osborne posits at the heart of the sacramental event.¹³

At a gathering of the International Academy of Practical Theology in 2003, the opening lecture was an exploration of pre-Schleiermachian sources of practical theology especially through the lens of public theology. The presenter concluded that the neglected source here was Erasmus of Rotterdam.¹⁴ In the ensuing discussion, multiple other “public theologians” of the late Renaissance or early Enlightenment were suggested as alternatives. At no time in the midst of the discussion was there any reference to Jesus, the aboriginal public-practical theologian.¹⁵ As I have argued elsewhere,¹⁶ it is not possible for Christians to broach issues of practical theology without somehow rooting that discussion at the heart of the Christian tradition and the Christian fact: Jesus, whom Christians proclaim as the Christ.

The New Testament is replete with narratives about Jesus in that foundational eucharistic practice of table ministry. It is this set of narratives, especially as outlined in the Gospel of Luke, that will set the “time” and “place” for this analysis. By examining the gospel discourse, which Christian tradition holds was rooted in the Jesus praxis, we hope to respect the experiential ground of practical theology. By considering those narratives through a few well chosen postcolonial lenses, particularly hybridity, we hope to craft an analysis that respects postcolonial critical theory. As a practical theologian, I intuitively believe that such an exploration is always

12 Paul De Clerck, *Lex orandi, lex credendi, Sens originel et avatars historiques d'un adage équivoque*, *Questions liturgiques* 59 (1978), 193–212.

13 Osborne (n. 9), 58.

14 William Storrar, *Locating Public Theology: Practical Theology as the Christian Humanist Discipline of Moral Cartography*, in: *Pathways to the Public Square, Practical Theology in an Age of Pluralism*, ed. Elaine Graham and Anna Rolands, Münster (LIT Verlag) 2006, 175–189.

15 His life was that of a public figure, his death was that of a public criminal. He theologized with the coin of the realm in his hand (Matthew 22:19–21), he publicly narrated parables about the nature of God's reign and its in-breaking in human history (Matthew 13:11–17), and he ritualized that parabolic in-breaking with multitudes on both the Jewish (Mark 6:34–44) and Gentile (Mark 8:1–10) sides of the Sea of Galilee. After trial before both religious (Matthew 26:57) and civil authorities (Matthew 27:11), he was eventually executed in the public square called Golgatha (Matthew 27:33–40).

16 See my *Liturgy as Public Theology*, *Studia Liturgica* 38,1 (2008), 31–52.

for the sake of renewed praxis.¹⁷ Thus, while an academic exercise, my hope is that my praxis of research and reflection might benefit the wider praxis of worship and faith. Thus, in the final part of this essay, we will consider contemporary eucharistic practice.

The Jesus Table¹⁸

Hospitality and table are closely intertwined in Jewish thought. The *mitzvah* (Hebrew, “commandment”) of hospitality (Hebrew, *hakhnasat orekhim*, literally “bringing in the guests”) is as old as the memory of Abraham and Sarah. It is in this broader Jewish context that one recognizes both the continuity and discontinuity of Jesus’ table ministry. Well versed in law and tradition, Jesus was called to the same table hospitality as his forebears, and is celebrated for his diversity of table companions. He feasts with religious leaders (Luke 14:1–24) and old family friends (Luke 10:38–42). He dines with the rich (Luke 5:27–39) and in the homes of the poor (Mark 1:31). He shares intimate meals (Luke 10:38–42) and breaks bread with multitudes (Matthew 14:13–21). There are women (John 4:4–42) and men (Luke 19:1–10); newlyweds (John 2:1–10) and children (John 6:9); Jews (Luke 11:37–54), Gentiles (Mark 8:1–9) and Samaritans (John 4:4–42); the revered (Luke 7:36–50) and the reviled (Luke 19:1–10).

Jesus not only embraces the Jewish virtue of table inclusivity but sometimes does so in clear contradiction of Jewish law and against the sensibilities of other Jews. He eats with throngs of Gentiles despite the biblical injunctions that food from Gentiles was considered unclean (e.g., Ezekiel 4:13, Hosea 9:3, Daniel 1:8). He remains two days with the Samaritans (John 4:40) presumably eating and drinking with them, even though “Jews had nothing to do with Samaritans” (John 4:8). Moreover, his table fellowship with sinners is legendary. Nathan Mitchell aptly describes the Jesus table in terms of randomness and argues that the very randomness of Jesus’ table habits challenged the system of social relationships modeled on meal and etiquette, and subverted them.¹⁹

Emblematic of Jesus’ table ministry is his open and persistent practice of eating and drinking with sinners. It is this unusual and dangerous act of

17 This is a common tenet among contemporary practical theologians, such as Thomas Groome’s understanding of the final move in his method for practical theology as one of “renewed Christian praxis.” Thomas Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry*, New York (HarperCollins) 1991, 266–293.

18 The following section draws from my *Which Jesus Table? Reflections on Eucharistic Starting Points*, *Worship* 82,1 (2008), 41–52.

19 Nathan Mitchell, *Eucharist as a Sacrament of Initiation*, Chicago (Liturgy Training Publications) 1994, 90.

table hospitality that, more than any other, embodies the discontinuity of Jesus' hospitality with that of his coreligionists and ultimately leads to his death. Edward Schillebeeckx considers Jesus the "eschatological messenger of God's openness towards sinners,"²⁰ and believes that Jesus' table openness to sinners is detectable in various strata of all the gospel traditions.²¹ The particularly Lukan tradition is represented in two meal stories. First is the weeping woman ministering to Jesus at the Pharisee's house (7:36–47), a remarkable tale in which Jesus not only encounters a publicly acknowledged sinner,²² but seems to encourage the intimacy she displays towards him.²³ Luke also is the sole narrator of the pericope in which Jesus invites himself into the home of the chief tax collector Zaccheus (19:1–10), not simply for a meal but to be his house guest, thus displaying an usual degree of solidarity²⁴ with another notorious sinner. This is a fitting conclusion to that section of Luke sometimes called the "gospel of the outcast."²⁵ A parallel comment by Bruce Chilton illuminates this passage further. Chilton notes that Jesus commissions the twelve to preach and heal, remaining in whatever house they are received until they depart.²⁶ This command presupposes that what the disciples eat within any house which might receive them is "clean" even though it might contradict Levitical law.²⁷

One of the most gifted story tellers of the New Testament, Luke is also the only source of the parable of the "prodigal son" (Luke 15:11–32), a shocking tale for the pious of the day, in which the sinner who turns back to God becomes greater than the observant in the reign Jesus inaugurates. For Arthur Just, this parable reflects the significance of repentance for acceptance into the kingdom in Lukan table fellowship.²⁸ It is only through

20 Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, New York (Vintage Books) 1981, 206.

21 *Ibid.*, 206–213.

22 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza disputes the interpretation that she was a "woman of the city" or prostitute. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, New York (Crossroad) 1983, 129. However, more recently on this point, see: Barbara Reid, *Choosing the Better Part? Women in the Gospel of Luke*, Collegeville, Minn. (The Liturgical Press) 1996, 107–123.

23 Francis Moloney, *A Body Broken for a Broken People*, Melbourne (Collins Dove) 1990, 59.

24 Eugene LaVerdiere, *Dining in the Kingdom of God: The Origins of the Eucharist According to Luke*, Chicago (Liturgy Training Publications) 1994, 114.

25 T. W. Manson, *Sayings of Jesus as Recorded in the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke*, London (SCM Press) 1957, 282, as cited in Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV: Introduction, Translation and Notes*, New York (Doubleday) 1985, 1072, 1218.

26 Matthew 10:11–14; Mark 6:10; Luke 9:4, 10:5–7.

27 Bruce Chilton, *A Feast of Meanings: Eucharistic Theologies from Jesus through Johannine Circles*, Leiden (Brill) 1994, 37.

28 Arthur A. Just, *The Ongoing Feast: Table Fellowship and Eschatology at Emmaus*, Collegeville, Minn. (Liturgical Press) 1993, 182.

the lens of the wider table ministry of Jesus that the pervasive and radical nature of this invitation is to be understood, and allows a biblical scholar like Robert Karris to conclude that, at least in Luke's Gospel, "Jesus got himself crucified by the way he ate."²⁹ Thus, the summary by Norman Perrin from forty years ago about Jesus' table practice yet rings true: "Jesus welcomed...outcasts into table fellowship with himself in the name of the kingdom of God, in the name of the Jews' ultimate hope, and so both prostituted that hope and shattered the closed ranks of the community against their enemy. It is hard to imagine anything more offensive to Jewish sensibilities."³⁰

The Jesus Table as an Experience of Hybridity?

One of the more important themes in postcolonial theory is that of hybridity. Homi Bhabha is closely identified with this term. In exploring the power relationships between the "colonizer" and "colonized," Bhabha contends that hybridity is a product of their interdependence. It is the name he gives to "the strategic reversal of the process of domination"³¹ that occurs when a colonial power attempts to translate the identity of the colonized through its own, monoscopic lens. When this strategy fails, as it is bound to do, the result is "something familiar but new."³² This something new emerges in the ambivalent, liminal space between colonizer and colonized that Bhabha names "the third space."³³ This disruptive, ambiguous "third space" is not only a place where identities are expressed, but where they are in the process of being created and transformed. As Bhabha eloquently summarizes, "It is in this space that we will find those words with which we can speak of Ourselves and Others. And by exploring this hybridity, this 'Third Space,' we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves."³⁴

Hybridity as "third space" provides a fascinating lens for considering the Jesus table as a moment of subversive, ambiguous and liminal encoun-

29 Robert Karris, *Luke: Artist and Theologian*, New York (Paulist Press) 1985, 47. This perspective is reiterated by many other authors, e.g., Just (n. 28), 193.

30 Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus*, New York (Harper & Row) 1967, 103.

31 Homi Bhabha, *Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority Under a Tree outside Dehli, May 1817*, *Critical Inquiry* 12,1 (1985), cited in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, ed., *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, London (Routledge) 1995, 34–35.

32 Nikos Papastergiadis, *Tracing Hybridity in Theory*, in: *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multi-Cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism*, ed. Pnina Werbner and Tariq Modood, London (Zed Books) 1997, 279.

33 Homi Bhabha, *The Commitment to Theory*, *New Formations* 5 (1988), 5–23.

34 *Ibid.*

ter. While uncomfortable with labeling Jesus as any kind of “colonizer,” he was yet perceived by followers and foes alike (more often than not in very public venues) as one who possessed power and authority. Multiple times the gospels report that Jesus was one who taught with authority (Mark 1:22, Matthew 7:29, Luke 4:32); that he was recognized as one with authority over unclean spirits (Luke 4:36); that he claimed his authority from God (John 10:18) including the authority to forgive sins (Mark 2:10, Matthew 9:6, Luke 5:24); that he gave his disciples authority to cast out unclean spirits and to heal every kind of disease (Mark 6:7, Matthew 10:1, Luke 9:1); whose authority was publicly challenged by Jewish leaders (Mark 11:28, Matthew 21:23, Luke 20:2, John 2:18); and who claimed that the state had no authority over him (John 19:11).

Understood by self and others as one with recognizable power and authority, it is noteworthy how Jesus exercises his authority to negotiate that “third space” while at table. One remarkable example of this negotiation is in the previously mentioned story of Jesus’ invitation to dinner at the house of a Pharisee, where a woman who is an acknowledged sinner waits on him in the most intimate of ways (Luke 7:36–50). In the time-space liminality of the meal, there are a series of reversals: Jesus who was invited as the guest becomes the host; an uninvited sinful woman offers acts of hospitality that, in a more modest and moderate fashion, would belong to the host; the unspoken thoughts of the Pharisee become the point of Jesus’ public discourse; and the greater sinner becomes the more beloved.

The “third space” evoked in Luke 7 was accompanied by the ambiguous and controverted language of parable. Drawing upon the work of Claude Levi-Strauss, John Dominic Crossan has argued that, while mythic narration is designed to assure the listening that all contradictions can be resolved, parabolic narration disallows any facile resolution. In Crossan’s words, parables “are stories which shatter the deep structure of our accepted world and thereby render clear and evident to us the relativity of story itself. They remove our defenses and make us vulnerable to God.”³⁵

While stories of Jesus’ table ministry are often employed to demonstrate how they were transformative for others,³⁶ it seems that if the Jesus table were truly an experience of hybridity, then the experience had to be disruptive and liminal for Jesus as well as for those who broke bread with him. In his rethinking of the various strata of eucharistic materials in the New Testament, Bruce Chilton posits such a change on the part of the historical Jesus. Chilton argues that there are six major stages of meaning inherent within the eucharistic practices that have most influenced the texts of the New Testament. Stage one is Jesus’ encouragement of meals as celebrations

35 John Dominic Crossan, *The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story*, Niles, Ill. (Argus Communications) 1975, 122.

36 Mary Marshall, *Jesus: Glutton and Drunkard?*, *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 3,1 (2005), 47–60.

of Israel's purity in anticipation of God's kingdom. Stage two, however, reveals a change in Jesus' attitude toward his own table ministry. In this stage of his public praxis, according to Chilton, Jesus claims that such meals were a more acceptable sacrifice than worship in the Temple, which he came to regard as impure. Symbolic of this new understanding is what Chilton considers the "occupation of the Temple" (Mark 11:15). Chilton believes that through this gesture, Jesus made the issue of purity paramount, and argues that this incursion by Jesus is the culmination of a program that stressed forgiveness and genuine ownership of what was offered as requirements of acceptable sacrifice in the temple. Once Jesus' *halakah* about these requirements is not accepted, the character of his meals with the disciples changed. Earlier, they have been enactments of the purity that was demanded within sacrifice. Now that social purity and especially the food and drink consumed *are* the sacrifice, God is better pleased with this "blood" and "body" than gifts offered incorrectly on Mount Zion. The new scandalous element therein revealed is that God preferred a pure meal to impure sacrifice in the temple.³⁷

Here it would seem that, if Chilton is to be believed, the table became a "third space," neither a table celebrating purity nor the Temple of pure sacrifice, but the redefined table where Levitical purity laws were upturned by the reversals of repentance and forgiveness. It was a table where a new understanding of God's reign was being negotiated, and previous understandings of covenant were being turned inside out.

The double-sided nature of this third space is further underscored by Daniel Boyarin's consideration of "hybridity and heresy."³⁸ In examining the relationship between Judaism and early Christianity, Boyarin considers heresy not as doctrine but as discourse, and believes that we can properly understand the discourse of heresy as part of "the construction of a Christianity that would not be Judaism."³⁹ This is achieved through what Boyarin caricatures as the "religion-police" or "border guards" who have responsibility for protecting those permeable boundaries between different groups of believers. This policing involved identifying and interdicting "those who respected no borders, those smugglers of ideas and practices newly declared to be contraband nomads who would not recognize the efforts to institute limits, to posit a separation between 'two opposed places.'"⁴⁰ Boyarin is interested in developing a more credible model for the emergence of an independent Christianity than the traditional "family tree model." To that end, he had previously offered a "wave-theory account of Christian-Jewish history in which innovations disseminate and interact

37 Chilton (n. 28), 70.

38 Daniel Boyarin, *Hybridity and Heresy*, in: *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*, ed. Ania Loomba, Durham, N.C. (Duke University Press) 2005, 339–358.

39 *Ibid.*, 342.

40 *Ibid.*, 339–340.

like waves caused by stones thrown in a pond, an account in which convergence proved as possible as divergence.”⁴¹ By employing the lens of hybridity, Boyarin nuances his model in which there will be clearly Christian and non-Christian Jews, while “the boundaries between the two categories will remain undefinable.”⁴² Boyarin believes that through the discourse of heresy, including hate speech that contributes to calling the other into being, Christianity constructed itself as a religion different from Judaism, which refused to consider itself a religion in the same sense.

Revisiting the Jesus table from Boyarin’s perspective, we can begin to see that the creation of this “third space” was not only the work of Jesus. Nor was it only a negotiation between Jesus and those with whom he shared a table and common meal. Rather, it was also the result of the New Testament equivalents to “border guards,” such as those the gospels characterizes as Scribes and Pharisees who condemn Jesus for eating and drinking with sinners (e.g., Mark. 2:16, Matthew 9:11, etc.). Analogous to the hate speech of “heresy,” this New Testament evidence suggests that the Jewish authorities, attempting to safeguard their own purity and that of their community, contributed to the experience of this “third space.” By announcing and denouncing the impurity of the Jesus table, they contributed to its being “called into being.”⁴³ By naming the subaltern, they contributed to the creation of an experience of subalternity. And by announcing their separation from the Jesus table, they effected such a separation.

Communion, Developmental Disabilities, and the “Others of Our Selves”

From a sociopolitical perspective, it may be credible to think of the Jesus table as a “third space.” From the viewpoint of Christian theology, considering the Jesus table through the metaphors of hybridity and the “third space” offers promising possibilities for rethinking the eucharistic act that sprung from that table and can be said to “constitute the Church.”⁴⁴ As a practical theologian, it is incumbent upon me not only to consider the past archeology of eucharistic practices through a postcolonial lens, but also to construct a living dialogue between these conversation partners for the sake of renewed praxis. From my perspective, this dictates some engagement with contemporary Roman Catholic eucharistic practice. There are many practices that could be considered. Few, however, are more commonplace, theologically rich, and politically explosive the act of communion.

41 Ibid., 344–345.

42 Ibid., 347.

43 Ibid., 351.

44 Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, Notre Dame, Ind. (University of Notre Dame Press) 2006 [1949], 88.

The act of eucharistic eating and drinking is at the very heart of the eucharistic liturgy which itself is at the very heart of Roman Catholicism's self-definition.⁴⁵ Because of the centrality of liturgy in general and eucharist in particular to that self-definition, the Roman Catholic church has developed a considerable body of rituals and theologies, as well as rubrics and laws around these central actions of eating and drinking. To use Boyarin's metaphor, there are many "religion-police" and "border guards" who have responsibility for protecting the often permeable boundaries between believers and non-believers, the ritually acceptable and the ritually unacceptable, the canonically permitted and the canonically banned.

Metaphorically speaking, the front line of eucharistic "border guards" are ministers of communion: especially the ordained who are both practically and canonically the ordinary ministers of communion. It is a role with which I am most familiar.⁴⁶ The permeable and dangerous nature of this "eucharistic border" is continuously manifest in both subtle and obvious ways in the public acts of eating and drinking. As a visiting presider and ordinary minister of communion in a large urban parish, for example, I have no idea whether the vast number of people coming forward for communion are Roman Catholic or even baptized. Often it is even difficult to evaluate whether they are of an appropriate age for receiving communion. A pastor of a similar urban Catholic Church parish once confided to me that he was convinced that he unknowingly administered numerous "first communions" every weekend.

Apart from these "hidden" borders that are virtually impossible to monitor, public acts of eucharistic eating and drinking also have more obvious borders that are highly monitored. One of these became apparent during the U.S. national elections in 2004, when various prelates and theologians debated about politicians who supported abortion, or supported legislation that implicitly or explicitly recognized abortion as a legal act. At least one bishop subsequently issued a ban on "pro-abortion" politicians from receiving communion.⁴⁷ The "permeability" of such a border was reflected in the fact that of the 195 Roman Catholic dioceses in the United States, exceedingly few enacted such a ban, and the Internet was filled with photo-

45 Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, no. 10.

46 While I am aware that practical theological methods generally give priority to communal over individual experience (what is called "common human experience" in David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order*, New York (Seabury), 1975, 64–71), I offer this more personal reflection, aware of that limitation and with no presumption of its universality, but anecdotally aware of its resonance with some other clergy.

47 This was the position of Raymond Burke, then Bishop of LaCrosse, Wisc. Subsequently, as Archbishop of St. Louis, he published his arguments in a canonical journal in which he also challenged his brother bishops who had not spoken out on the issue. Raymond Burke, *The Discipline Regarding the Denial of Holy Communion to Those Obstinate Persevering in Manifest Grave Sin*, *Periodica De Re Canonica* 96 (2007), 3–58.

graphs of “pro-abortion” politicians crossing those borders or, in the language of some bloggers, engaging in “sacrilegious communion.”

While I have never been confronted with such an explosive public border crossing, there are yet other subtle border negotiations that occur on a routine basis in the acts of eating and drinking, and so break open the hybridity of the moment. Every time a person with celiac disease approaches communion, for example, the borders of pastoral care and canon law are tested.⁴⁸ Does the parish purchase low-gluten hosts? If so, do they consecrate them on a regular basis, or must an individual make a special request? The latter would certainly seem to reveal communion’s potential as an event of subalternity. Then there are the large number of alcoholics who comprise up to 10% of some eucharistic assemblies.⁴⁹ While Roman Catholic law and theology continuously affirm the value of receiving communion under both forms, the canonical restrictions around the use of mustum or wine with low alcoholic content means that, for all intents and purposes, it is not available to the baptized.⁵⁰

At the outset of this essay, I noted that if postcolonial theory is a mode of oppositional discourse, one needed to be cautious engaging this critical theory in a liturgical arena that is already the scene of much oppositional discourse and not in need of more discord or contestation. At the same time, if this critical lens is to be exercised, one needs to engage with some observable eucharistic practice that mirrors the Jesus experience and allows for the opening of that “third space.” Happily, there is such a liminal practice that has received affirmation both pastorally and canonically from the U.S.

48 Celiac disease causes a dangerous reaction of the immune system when a person with this disease is exposed to gluten in the wheat. In 2003, the University of Chicago Hospitals released a study indicating that this disease is much more common than usually recognized and 1 out of 133 in the U.S. suffer from it, though only 1 in 4,700 has been diagnosed. See <http://www.uchospitals.edu/news/2003/20030210-celiac.html> (accessed 26 March 2009). In response, the Vatican has given permission from the use of “low-gluten hosts,” but decreed that hosts that are completely gluten-free are “invalid matter” for the celebration of the Eucharist (Joseph Ratzinger, *Congregation for Doctrine of the Faith*, 2003 as reported by the US bishops at <http://www.usccb.org/liturgy/innews/1103.shtml>, accessed 26 March 2009).

49 In a yet credible calculation, James E. Royce and David Scratchley wrote: “In 1993 [the National Council on Alcohol and Drug Dependence] put the figure at 12.1 million. Using our working definition but applying it conservatively, one can say as a rule of thumb that alcoholics constitute 4 percent of the general population. In an adult population where at least three-fourths are drinkers, about 6 percent of the total group are probably alcoholic. In groups where practically all are drinkers, as in certain professions or types of work, the alcoholism rate may run about 8 percent, or one in twelve. If we include alcohol abusers as well as alcoholics, the best estimate is 10.5 percent of working Americans.” James E. Royce and David Scratchley, *Alcoholism and Other Drugs*, New York (Free Press) 1996, 13.

50 Consult the Vatican document cited in n. 45 above.

bishops: the reception of communion by those with intellectual disabilities,⁵¹ an event with which I have some experience.

In the early 1990s, six colleagues⁵² at Catholic Theological Union and I had the opportunity to engage in extended theological reflection with the three leaders of the Special Religious Education Division (SPRED) of the Archdiocese of Chicago. The mission of SPRED is to “to assist persons with developmental disabilities and or learning problems to become integrated into parish assemblies of worship through the process of education in faith.”⁵³ The focus of our reflections was the expressed difficulty that people with intellectual disabilities often experience with sacraments, namely, that many are often refused sacraments because they do not appear to have reached the “age of reason.” Over the course of our sharing and eventual writing together,⁵⁴ I gained many insights about the dynamics of sacramental events that included the participation of people with developmental disabilities. A key insight came from Dianne Bergant, whose reflections on the Hebrew Scriptures helped me understand that “anomalous” ritual experiences (such as those confronting the chosen people during the period of the exile), required not only the redefinition of criteria for access but also a new model for thinking what it means to be human.⁵⁵

While we were in the midst of this project, I was regularly presiding and preaching at a local parish in which people with intellectual disabilities were regular worshippers. This was a new experience for me: truly anomalous. One gregarious young adult with intellectual disabilities (I will call him “Jamie”) ordinarily accompanied his parents to Sunday morning worship. Jamie did not have the self-consciousness of most other worshippers and, while virtually never disruptive, it was not unusual for Jamie to announce to his father with a booming voice in the middle of eucharist, “Done.” It was clear at that point that the service was over for him, though

51 On June 16, 1995, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops approved the Guidelines for Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities, which do not speak of some “age of reason” but only “use of reason” and further notes that “criterion for reception of holy communion is...that the person be able to distinguish the Body of Christ from ordinary food, even if this recognition is evidenced through manner, gesture, or reverential silence rather than verbally.... Cases of doubt should be resolved in favor of the right of the baptized person to receive the sacrament. The existence of a disability is not considered in and of itself as disqualifying a person from receiving the eucharist,” no. 20.

52 Herbert Anderson, Dianne Bergant, Mark Francis, John Huels, Barbara Reid and Paul Wadell.

53 From the official SPRED website at <http://www.spred.org/> (accessed 27 March 2009).

54 Those reflections eventually led to publication of: Edward Foley, ed., *Developmental Disabilities and Sacramental Access: New Paradigms for Sacramental Encounters*, Collegeville, Minn. (Liturgical Press) 1994.

55 Dianne Bergant, *Come, Let Us Go up to the Mountain of the Lord*, in: Foley (n. 54), 13–32.

his always attentive father had the uncanny ability to keep Jamie content regardless of how much of the ritual lay ahead of us. After mass, I eventually was honored with a one word greeting by this engaging young man. When his parents would stop in the narthex to say hello and his father would ask Jamie, "Who is this?" he would grin and shout "Eddie," the only time that nickname has ever been acceptable, much less appreciated by me.

Communion was an unusual dance with Jamie and one that the family had to teach me. It was also one I did not lead. Jamie always came down the aisle walking next to his father, who had instructed me that it was best that he gave Jamie the bread. When they approached, the father took a host from the outstretched paten which I held, and gave his son communion with the traditional text, "Body of Christ." It was only after Jamie had received and consumed that the father turned to me, signaling that he was ready to receive, after which I administered communion to him with the traditional text.

It was a small moment in our eucharistic worship to be sure, probably unnoticed by the vast majority of the other ministers and members of the assembly. Furthermore, it did not occur every week, since I rotated through the presiding schedule on Sunday mornings. On the other hand, in the dozen years that I preached and presided in that community, this eucharistic dance happened with enough frequency and regularity that it made an indelible impression on me. At the time, I did not have adequate language to frame this unfamiliar dance that disrupted the eucharistic pattern I had practiced for decades. The language of postcolonial theory provides welcomed insights that I will here briefly explore.

The work of Catherine Bell and others ritual theorists, especially those influenced by the work of Michel Foucault, alerted us to the dangerous reality that every ritual is some kind of negotiation of power.⁵⁶ Within that awareness, I naïvely imagined that as a middle aged, Caucasian, highly educated Roman Catholic priest, I was the one with power in the eucharistic assembly, and my task as a servant-leader⁵⁷ was to share it with others. These nascent reflections on postcolonial theory, however, clarify that in that eucharistic dance with Jamie and his father, I was not the only one with power. Furthermore, it does not appear that the brunt of the human power in that event resided with either me or the father. Instead, it was Jamie—his needs, his moods, his capacities, and his well being—who was the dictating force in the eucharistic exchange. This is not to say that all power resided in him, for each one of us in this liturgical triad had the power of engagement, collusion, or resistance. At the same

56 Catherine Bell, *The Power of Ritualization*, in: Id., *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, New York (Oxford University Press) 1992, 197–223.

57 Robert Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness*, New York (Paulist Press) 1991.

time, in retrospect I recognize that this was clearly a moment when I was pastorally compelled to cede ground that supposedly defined the very heart of my presiding ministry. It was one of the most gracious and unexpected experiences of subalternity in which I have participated.

Returning to the concept of hybridity, we recall Bhabha's contention that hybridity can be understood as "the strategic reversal of the process of domination" that occurs when a colonial power attempts to translate the identity of the colonized through its own, monoscopic lens. While the category or dynamic of "colonizer" is one that I have predicated of myself, I have never done so with reference to my liturgical ministry. Upon reflection, however, the eucharistic dance with Jamie and his father suggests that colonizing tendencies have been and are afoot when I preach and preside. What Jamie and his father helped me grasp, at least in the praxis, was that the colonizing move clearly failed, and in the process "something familiar but new," what we might call a "third space," emerged. While not his theological intent, Bhabha aptly provides a powerful lens for considering this eucharistic matrix in which identities are not only expressed but are also in the process of being created and transformed.

In that revelation, I discovered a new framework for understanding my own liturgical ministry as eucharistic preacher and presider, helping to crack the stayed binaries of a eucharistic framework which envisions the liturgy as a dialogue between priest and people as an analogy for our dialogue with God. Resonant with the subversive disruption of the Jesus table, but acutely conscious of the many liturgical border guards who have a proper role in our worship life, I feel compelled to preside and preach in such a manner to enable the appearance of liturgical eddies or the occasional vortex that allow for a pattern of "third space" eruptions where people and ministry are recreated and transformed in unending variety.

Conclusion

This article originated as part of a project with other Roman Catholic theologians who work in practical theology. One of the questions raised in our two years of work together was whether there was a difference between Roman Catholics who work in practical theology and Roman Catholic practical theologians. While that might sound like a guild question to some ("To which academic guild do you belong?"), for me it is more a meta-methodological question.

My terminal theological degree is in the area of liturgics, and so I both thought of myself and was labeled by others as a "liturgist." While steeped in the classical methods of liturgiology that I still employ in scholarship and teaching, I have been concerned with the potential stagnation of liturgics as a sometimes obscure and rarefied examination of ancient Armenian foot washing rituals or the like. Such studies, including my own doctoral disser-

tation on worship in the twelfth century at St. Denis in France, many times left me asking “What does this have to do with worship today?” It was my gradual introduction to a correlational approach to practical theology that allowed me to keep asking questions about our tradition, but with new frames that pushed me to engage the contemporary context and the panoply of experiences, perceptions, and interpretations, individual and communal, within that context. In some ways, practical theology has become a theological vernacular for me (and, I hope, some of my students and even colleagues) that enables me to engage a particular *métier* such as liturgy without being banished to some subdisciplinary silo, unable to communicate convincingly to other theologians and religious practitioners.

While I could be considered a Roman Catholic who does some form of practical theology, I would go further. Worship, preaching, and sacramentality—my life’s work and passion—are at the heart of Roman Catholicism’s self-definition. Some would go so far as to suggest that the Roman Catholic imagination itself is “sacramental.” My ecclesially defined (but not contained) work on worship, sacramentality and distinctly Roman Catholic forms of preaching (the “homily”) suggest that I am not only a Roman Catholic doing practical theology, but also that my practical theological affinities and prejudices take me to the very center of my understanding of my own church and help me see myself as a Roman Catholic practical theologian. Said in another way, Roman Catholicism (especially its sacramental self-perception) and practical theology together are the mutual critical correlation that defines me as a theologian and believer. Thus, this revisiting of the Jesus table in postcolonial mode exemplifies in some small way my mission as an ecclesially defined thinker, practitioner, and believer, committed to a sacramental view of the world that demands some considered, even subversive response to the nagging “So what?” questions that confront my scholarship.

Abstract

This article reconsiders the table ministry of Jesus through the lens of postcolonial theory. This theoretical exercise is put in dialogue with contemporary Roman Catholic eucharistic practice with people with intellectual disabilities. It is intended as both a contribution to and critique of classical forms of liturgical inquiry. It is further designed to underscore the potential both for the explicit engagement of practical theological frameworks for Roman Catholic theologians while at the same time exemplifying the unique contributions Roman Catholic theologians might make to a wider discourse in practical theology.

Zusammenfassung

Dieser Beitrag untersucht den Tischdienst Jesu aus der Perspektive postkolonialer Theorie. Die theoretischen Überlegungen werden in einen Dialog gebracht mit der gegenwärtigen römisch-katholischen Eucharistiepraxis mit Menschen mit geistiger Behinderung. Zweierlei Absicht wird damit verfolgt: Einerseits einen Beitrag zur klassischen Forschung im Bereich der Liturgik zu liefern, andererseits diese kritisch anzufragen. Schließlich soll mit diesem Beitrag das Potential betont werden, das zum einen in der expliziten Einbindung praktisch-theologischer Konzeptionen für römisch-katholische Theologen liegt, zum anderen werden gleichzeitig damit die spezifischen Beiträge der römisch-katholischen Theologen im weiten Horizont der Diskurslandschaft Praktischer Theologie aufgezeigt.

