

We Want More!

Becoming “Consistently Plural” in Language, Liturgy, and Life

Paul L. Escamilla

T*his Holy Mystery* gives voice to a long-held yearning within the people called Methodist to experience a “richer sacramental life.”¹ The landmark document begins with

the story of a little girl holding a disappointingly small piece of Communion bread and crying out, “I want more! I want more!” As we read on, we find ourselves echoing the young girl’s cry with our own: “Yes—we want more too!”

Within our denomination, one of the profound shifts in the last half-century with regard to Holy Communion can be illustrated by that pluralizing echo: from “I want more!” to “We want more!” To put it another way, in our Eucharistic theology and liturgy we have been moving gradually and gracefully toward a more faithful integration of individual and communal dimensions of sacramental participation.²

From the first words of the Table prayers to the last, the language of the Spanish liturgy makes clear that what has been spread before us is in its very essence a koinonia meal, a gift from God for the whole community of faith, a channel of grace too wide for one and broad enough for all.

One simple indication of this amplified understanding is the way in which our interpretation of a biblical text foundational in shaping sacramental piety has evolved. Where once Paul’s admonition to “discern the body” at the table (1 Cor. 11:29) was taken to be a metaphysical reference to the crucified and transcendent Christ, we now generally agree that its context suggests another, more palpable meaning—“the body” of Christ we discern in the Holy Meal includes my brothers and sisters in the room

and beyond.³ We are learning that if the Eucharist is a means of spiritual communion, then the communing is intrinsically horizontal as well as vertical, corporate as well as personal.

The Hispanic United Methodist experience of the Lord’s Supper may help to infuse the wider church with such an understanding, nurtured as this tradition is by a mother tongue within

that from beginning to end the language of the Table tethers us to one another. The “consistently plural” pronouns of which *This Holy Mystery speaks*⁴ are, in Spanish, the sum and substance of the table prayers: *El Señor sea con ustedes*, begins the Preface. “The Lord be with *all of you*.”

When we come to Jesus’ words of institution, the English pronoun structure leaves us with the inevitable tendency to singularize and even privatize their meaning: “This is my body, given for you.” By comparison, the Spanish pronouns are (as with Greek) unambiguously plural: *Tomad, comed . . .* “Take, *all of you*; eat, *all of*

gins of mainstream society, what it means to “travel far.” Nor is the journey merely one of geography; more precisely, the long journey is one that leads to dignity, stability, and a sense of belonging. It is the journey that leads from having contributed meaningfully to having been regarded meaningfully in return.

As the proverb suggests, a long journey necessitates sticking together—not just *receiving* the bread when it comes our way, but *sharing* it—and so we do. The hymn, “*Camina, Pueblo de Dios*” (“Walk On, O People of God,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 305), speaks to such a shared journey, encouraging the whole people of



El Señor sea con ustedes

you . . .” *Esto es mi cuerpo que por vosotros es partido*. “This is my body, given for *all of you*.” From the first words of the Table prayers to the last, the language of the Spanish liturgy makes clear that what has been spread before us is in its very essence a *koinonia* meal, a gift from God for the *whole* community of faith, a channel of grace too wide for one and broad enough for all.

I have broken bread among my Hispanic sisters and brothers in established sanctuaries and tiny apartments, in sacramental worship and simple love feasts. In nearly every instance, the sense of what we call *compañerismo* (literally, “a sharing of the bread”) is unmistakable. What we partake of, we partake of together; what we seek to discern in the Table sharing is Christ in gifts of bread and cup *and* Christ in one another. For those of us for whom the Spanish language is either a native idiom or a formative frame of reference, the Lord’s Table is clearly understood as having a shared point of entry. “I want more!” is always overlaid—or more precisely, undergirded—with “We want more!”

Bishop Rhymes Moncure often quotes an African proverb that says, “If you want to travel fast, travel alone; if you want to travel far, travel together.” Latin Americans in these United States know well, as do other constituent communities who are striving to emerge from the mar-

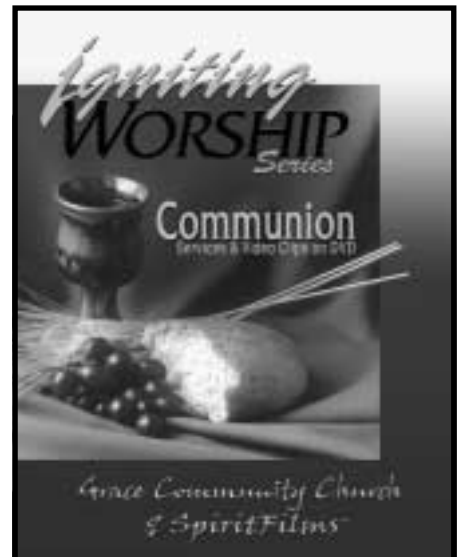
God to “walk on” together. If we are faithful, we share that long journey with any who walk it—indeed, with all creation. We are called to become “consistently plural,” not only in our pronouns, but in our worldview, in our prayers and practices, and in the only life we truly have, our life together in Christ. □

1. Gayle Carlton Felton, *This Holy Mystery* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources), 9.
2. See p. 8, *This Holy Mystery*, “Communion of the church.”
3. *This Holy Mystery*, 18.
4. *This Holy Mystery*, 8.



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