

Author: Paul F. Bosch [ [pbosch@golden.net](mailto:pbosch@golden.net) ]  
Series: *Worship Workbench*  
Issue: *Essay 121 + November, 2007*



Copyright: © 2007 Paul F. Bosch.

*This document may be freely reproduced for non-commercial purposes with credit to the author and mention of the [Lift Up Your Hearts](http://www.worship.ca) web site < [www.worship.ca](http://www.worship.ca) > as the source.*

## ECUMENICAL HOSPITALITY AND THE CLASH OF PIETIES

My own Lutheran congregation in this town has for several years cooperated with another local Lutheran parish and a nearby Anglican congregation in holding common Wednesday evening services in Lent.

Last year as in previous years a joint committee was formed, representing all three parishes, and we decided to hold all Services at the Anglican church building, but with differing rites and differing worship leadership. For one of our joint services, I was elected to lead an Anglican Eucharist — that’s what Anglicans call it; see [Essay 28](#) above — in the Anglican church building, using the Anglican *Book of Alternative Services*.

In spite of our best efforts, and of my own careful preparation and rehearsal, the evening, I felt, was just short of a disaster. Not once but twice I lost my place in the Anglican altar book. The Anglican Eucharistic rite itself (like that in our own *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*) is scattered throughout the volume: The bulk of the Service here, but the Collect (Prayer of the Day) some pages beyond, and the Eucharistic Prayer in still a third location in the book.

Further, our preacher for the evening was from still a third Christian tradition, that of the United Church in Canada, and, innocently enough and understandably enough, she had provided a set of prayers and propers altogether unlike the set of prayers I had prepared. To accommodate her desires, and in a spirit of ecumenical goodwill, I arranged with the Anglican incumbent (as Canadian Anglicans call their *pastor loci*) to fasten her prayer requests into the Anglican altar book temporarily with tape. But at catastrophic cost to me: I was further encumbered, in my role as Presider — Anglicans use the term “Celebrant” ([Essay 28](#) again) — in keeping now not two pieties in some kind of satisfactory order, but three.

And as I fumbled through my role that night, I could feel the congregation fidgeting at

my awkwardness. Some in the pews were simply ill at ease in a supportive empathy, I'm sure. Some, I worried, were critical. "This fellow has lost his place!"

As you can suppose, I smiled through the entire ordeal. ([Essay 60](#).) But I was greatly uncomfortable. And I cannot believe that the experience was very satisfactory, to anyone's piety, neither that of the clergy present, nor of their people in the pews.

Now, I hear you saying, enough with this self-serving melodrama. All this is nothing but the paranoid breast-beating of a Teutonic temperament, of an obsessive-compulsive control freak. OK. I'll grant you that. ([Essay 66](#).) Most people present, I hear you arguing, were simply amused by my gaffs and goofs, quick to excuse, quick to forgive. OK. I'll grant you that as well.

And hey, this whole series of postings is meant to serve as shop-talk among professionals, right? (This stays between us, you and me.)

But I want you to feel some of my discomfort, excusing if you must the melodrama. I take the responsibilities of worship leadership with high seriousness. And I sincerely enjoy doing what I've been called to do. Worshippers for their part have a right to expect that their worship leaders will be competent and faithful mechanics, that they'll know their trade, that they'll know and love the tools of their trade — the altar book, in this case — and know how to use them.

I felt I had betrayed that trust that night.

Beyond that, a larger issue remains for me: How may Christians in any location exercise ecumenical hospitality in worship? When two or even three pieties converge and even collide?

Lest I be misunderstood, I want to affirm all three pieties represented at that discomfiting Service. I'm not saying — not yet, anyhow — that any one of those pieties is better than another. I'm only observing, for now, that they're different.

Anglicans simply have a different approach to things than Lutherans. And United Church piety is different still. Each has its own presuppositions. Each has its own assumptions. Each has its own set of priorities and practices and pieties, altogether self-evident in its own context, but experienced by others outside that context, outside that system, as at least somewhat bizarre, somewhat problematic — perhaps even somewhat heterodox.

So what to do? Should we stop worshipping together? Should our differing pieties divide us at the door of the church?

That would be a shame, in my view — in both senses of that word. We simply must continue to worship together. Must continue to pray and sing together. Must continue

to share Bread and Cup together.

But I don't believe it's helpful for our leaders to try to usurp each other's leadership.

And so-called concelebration is not a helpful solution, in my view. Concelebration is ecclesiologicaly problematic, for me. Two clergy — or more! — sharing in the blessing of Bread and Cup seems to me to send the signal: “Well, it must be legitimate because our man — or our woman — is up there too.”

At that fateful night's debacle, by our mutual agreement, the Anglican incumbent led the Service of the Word (the *synaxis*, you might say) and I as Lutheran led the Eucharistic rite (the *anaphora*). This arrangement gave me, as welcomed visitor, a little less to worry about, but it did not prevent my screwing up in the limited role I *did* have.

Perhaps, at such inter-church events, the best we can expect, for now, is this: Each tradition should be content simply to accept the hospitality of the host congregation, and be prepared to worship in the manner and according to the pieties of the people who are host.

When I as a Lutheran worship with Anglicans in an Anglican church building, I should be willing to try to worship like an Anglican. That might mean kneeling for all prayers. That's a practice I find uncongenial to my personal piety. So although I might grind my teeth, I'd also have to bite my tongue, so to speak, and endure it. And kneel, with the people around me. It'd be simply a matter of my respecting your rules of etiquette, of my accepting the assumptions of your tradition.

“When in Rome...” That kind of thing.

And I'd expect a reciprocal respect, when you come to visit me.

Or when the two of us are guests in a United Church setting. We'd all three of us respect each other's differing practice, each others' unique patterns of piety. That might mean remaining seated for prayers and hymns. That's also a practice I find uncongenial to my personal piety. So once again, I'd grind my teeth. But I'd bite my tongue, and not complain. And remain seated, to show respect for your rules of etiquette, for the assumptions of your tradition.

In such a manner we'd get to know each other, and each other's pieties. And it would take a long time, worshipping like that in your pew, before I, for one, as a Lutheran pastor, would feel comfortable presiding again at an Anglican Eucharist. Or at a United Church service.

Meantime, would it make any sense, would it advance our ecumenical unity, for leaders to share in any fuller way in each other's worship leadership? I'd probably feel comfortable, even tomorrow, in reading a selection of scripture — in serving as lector,

that is — in your parish worship.

Much more than that? I don't think so. Not until I'm really comfortable worshipping in your pew.

Hey, I'm barely comfortable worshipping in other *Lutheran* pews!

