

EUCCHARISTIA RECOVERED*

It is often unnecessarily academic or just plain lazy to hide behind a foreign word, but I am afraid I must hide behind this particular word for some little time as the point I am trying to make is that the definition of the word, at least when it is used abstractly, is a circumlocution almost as long as this paper. When I come to the more technical use of the word in liturgy I mean really the Great Prayer of the Communion Service, from the words 'it is verily meet, right . . .' down to the Lord's Prayer. Eucharistia Recovered.

In his article published in the journal *Leiturgia*, under the title 'Zur Lehre von Gottesdienst', Peter Brunner draws attention to the absence in the New Testament of traditional liturgical terms for the description of worship. None of the possible words seems adequate to describe the Christian service of worship. Words like *latreia*, *thrēskeia* and *sebasma* are used in the New Testament to describe non-Christian worship but not otherwise. Even *leitourgia* has in Hebrews a fairly specialized meaning and is not a generic term for the community's worship. Forsaking cultic vocabulary altogether the New Testament uses terms from everyday life: *sunagesthai* which means simply to come together and *en ecclesia sunerchesthai* to come together in Church or as a Church. The noun *Synaxis* had a certain currency from the fourth century onwards, but strangely enough did not finally establish itself as a term to denote Christian worship. The only other such term Peter Brunner finds in the New Testament is 'breaking of bread', Acts 2:42, 46 and 20:17. Since in all probability the Christian community almost never met for worship without celebrating the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper he suggests that this term 'breaking of bread' may be held to be the oldest designation of Christian worship. Again, however, the use of the term in this way did not persist. Indeed it is only rarely found outwith the New Testament.

Let us, however, consider this last term a little more carefully. We say 'breaking of bread' may be the oldest designation of Christian worship. In itself it is not a cultic term but refers to a daily Palestinian domestic practice and it includes undoubtedly the grace which invariably preceded this practice. Then likewise the Christian quasi-liturgical use of the term 'breaking of bread' can be assumed to presuppose the presence of the Christian equivalent of the grace. Now the New Testament uses two verbs to describe this action of saying grace: *eulogeō* and *eucharisteō*. They seem to be merely transla-

* A paper read on 16 November 1970 to the Aberdeenshire Theological Club.

tion variants – or to be more precise *eulogēsas* (when He had blessed) without an object, as in the account of the Last Supper, is a semitism. In secular Greek the verb is constructed with an object and the absolute use of it would sound very strange in non-Palestinian circles. *Eucharistēsas* which occurs in Luke and in I Cor. 11:24 is a Graecizing of the semitism. The avoidance of semitisms and possible misunderstanding would of course be particularly important if the text were being used liturgically. We know from three more Pauline passages Rom. 14:6; I Cor. 10:30; I Tim. 4:3 f. that *eucharistein* was used in hellenistic Judaism of the daily grace.

Then if we may state the position afresh: the earliest name for Christian Sunday worship is 'breaking of bread'. This presupposes and includes *eucharistia*. The name 'breaking of bread' derives from one part of the action, the implied *eucharistia* is another part of the action.

We may now take another step, noting in passing that when Our Lord said, 'This do in remembrance of Me' He will have been understood to mean the action covered by the word *eucharistein* as well as the action of breaking bread.

Move now a very little way beyond the New Testament in time and we find that in the *Didache*, in the *Epistles* of Ignatius and in Justin Martyr's *Apology* the word *eucharistia*, again on the principle of a part for the whole, has replaced the phrase 'breaking of bread' and is now the description for Christian Sunday worship. The *Didache* may be early second century, the *Epistles* of Ignatius can be more certainly dated to the time of Trajan (A.D. 98–117) and Justin's *Apology* to circa A.D. 115. If now it can be shown that already in the New Testament the words *eucharistein* and *eucharistia* have fairly clear liturgical overtones then we should be able to say that the term Eucharist, though it is not actually the oldest description of worship, certainly enters into such close competition with its rival 'breaking of bread' as to be almost contemporaneous. We remember moreover that the word Eucharist survives to the present day whereas the other quickly disappeared. In considering the word *eucharistia* therefore we are not only considering the oldest liturgical term still in use but also treating of something which has been the heart of Christian worship since the earliest decades of the Christian era.

As suggested above it will enhance the credibility of this thesis if it can be shown that already in the New Testament the noun *eucharistia* and the verb *eucharistein* are quasi-liturgical words and to this we now address ourselves.

Chapter 3 of Jeremias' book *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* is entitled 'The Influence of Worship upon the Transmission of the Eucharistic Text'. It is quite beyond the scope of this paper to

reproduce Jeremias' arguments in their detail of textual criticism. We must content ourselves with a few of the points he makes.

His identification of John 6:53-58 as a eucharistic homily is worth noting. You will remember that the Fourth Gospel, in contrast to the Synoptics, does not have an account of the institution of the Lord's Supper in the context of its passion narrative. It does, however, have a clear reference to the Supper in this passage in John 6. With its eucharistic vocabulary the section appears in parts quite alien to the preceding discourse and yet Jeremias is convinced that the whole section is Johannine. He therefore offers the suggestion that John is here using traditional eucharistic expressions, perhaps even an actual traditional eucharistic homily. The cue for it is John 6:51, 'The bread which I will give is my flesh for life of the world.' This corresponds closely to Jesus' words of interpretation in the Corinthians' account of the institution, 'This is My Body which is broken for you'. Our interest is in the emergence already of a pattern – words of institution, words of interpretation, homily on them – and the presence already of traditional homilies. Perhaps this is what Paul means by, 'Ye do proclaim the Lord's death till He come'.

The most impressive part of Jeremias' argument emerges from an analysis of the variations in the four accounts of the institution. This shows the influence of liturgical usage everywhere at work. For example in Paul the phrase 'The Lord Jesus' (The Lord Jesus the same night on which He was betrayed) belongs to liturgical confessional formulae. It is nowhere used in narrative. Similarly 'the same night on which He was betrayed' is liturgical: it is not a mere chronological statement. Again the phrases in which the verbs *eulogein* and *eucharistein* occur read very much like liturgical rubrics.

From yet another area of Jeremias' studies there is evidence of developed liturgical practice. I refer to his contention that already in the New Testament there are indications that the Eucharist is separated from the Agape.

Finally Jeremias contends that the silence of the Fourth Gospel about the institution of the Lord's Supper is to be explained as arising from a concern to protect from the general public the sacred formulae. Our interest is in the fact that again this presupposes there were formulae to hide.

Turn now to another group of Pauline passages. Peter Brunner examines two. The first of them is I Cor. 10:16, 'The cup of blessing which we bless (*ho eulougoumen*) is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break . . .'. There is no doubt that Paul here knows a liturgical practice based on Our Lord's own example. Furthermore there is a strong suggestion in the whole cast of the text that it is the blessing that makes the cup a sacrament.

The cup of blessing is a common Jewish phrase: the additional 'which we bless' is the new feature. The second passage Peter Brunner examines is I Cor. 14: 16 f. – the passage about speaking with tongues. It reads 'else when thou shalt bless with the Spirit (*eulogēs*), how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks (*epi tē sē eucharistia*), seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest? For thou verily givest thanks well (*eucharisteis*) but the other is not edified.' Is it accidental that the same verbs occur here as in the accounts of the institution of the Lord's Supper? Is it not highly probable that Paul is here referring to prayers in the context of the Eucharist. The reference to a congregational Amen could hardly be clearer. We should also remember that for a very long time the great prayer of the Eucharist did continue to be 'free' prayer, prayed with the understanding certainly but nevertheless improvisation, 'praying with the Spirit'. It is this that explains the phrase still found in our modern services, 'not as we ought *but as we are able* do we bless Thee . . .'

Walter Reindell suggests that behind II Thess. 1: 3 'we are bound to thank God always' may well lie the familiar liturgical formula of all eucharists ' . . . that we should at all times . . . give thanks unto Thee'.

Heb. 12: 22-24 'but ye are come unto Mount Zion . . . and to an innumerable company of angels' resembles closely the eucharistic prayer ' . . . with angels and archangels and all the company of Heaven'.

Two more passages only can here be examined. These are from the Book of Revelation, the liturgical character of great parts of which is a study in itself. We turn to Revelation chapter 4. This is the chapter which, as you will remember, contains a vision of celestial worship and includes a version of what we now call the Sanctus. Clearly there lies behind this liturgical material of some kind. Pierre Prigent in his book *Apocalypse et Liturgie* has in fact discovered in this whole passage a substratum of Jewish liturgy with certain very significant Christian amendments. Indeed he traces a clear line from a Jewish liturgical model to the first great Christian liturgies and suggests that this chapter may represent the first Christian adaptation of that Jewish original.

One example of this process of amendment and adaptation is perhaps to be found in the text of the Sanctus itself. In Revelation it appears in the form 'Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty, which was and is and is to come'. This is not Isaiah: there probably lies behind it a Jewish liturgical formula. Nevertheless the phrase 'is to come' is odd. One would expect 'which was and is and ever shall be'. The ontological conception of eternity is disrupted by the phrase 'is to come'. Is this perhaps an amendment in the Christian liturgy?

Similarly in verse 9 the living creatures give 'glory and honour and *eucharistia*'. Again this is an odd trilogy. The notion of the cosmic hymn of praise is broken and by what? Clearly the Eucharist. The twenty-four elders who take up the song are the representatives of the spiritual Israel, the Church. The heavenly liturgy is united to the earthly. Erik Peterson confirms this point by showing that the word *eucharistia* is only possible where God has manifested Himself in some way. It is therefore mentioned in Greek dedicatory inscriptions which express thanks for a deliverance or restoration of health. It stands in marked contrast therefore to the other two words glory and honour. The *eucharistia* here therefore is the *eucharistia* of the Church celebrating the Eucharist.

At this point we must pretermit New Testament exegesis and trust that this brief excursion has proved the presence of a strong liturgical consciousness in the New Testament itself and thereby enhanced the thesis of the first part of this paper, which I state again: that in studying the word *eucharistia* we are not only considering the oldest liturgical term still in use but also treating of something which, only imperfectly concealed under the term 'breaking of bread', has been the heart of Christian worship since the earliest decades of the Christian era.

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The content of the early *eucharistia* must now engage our attention. We have seen that within apostolic times the whole celebration has begun to be called the Eucharist. What was the nature of the *eucharistia* from which it takes its name?

In order to understand this properly and in order to preclude the misconceptions which have arisen from imperfect English translations of the Greek word *eucharistia* I think it is useful to consider once again Our Lord's own *eucharistia* and the possible character of it. *eucharistēsas* – what did He say? Assuming the Last Supper to have been a Passover meal normal practice would be for the paterfamilias to rise from his reclining position, take a cake of unleavened bread and recite the blessing. It runs as follows: 'Praised be Thou, O Lord our God, King of the World, who causest bread to come forth from the earth'. The company respond Amen. This is in fact the daily blessing. A special word might be added at the Passover meal. Jeremias thinks it is very probable that Jesus gave this blessing a form of His own. After the meal the paterfamilias would again rise from his reclining position and having taken the cup of watered wine out of the hand of the person serving at table would speak, as he sat, the exhortation-blessing: 'Let us praise the Lord our God, to whom belongs that of which we have partaken'. Those at table would respond: 'Praised be our God for the food we have eaten'.

Then he would take the 'cup of blessing' in his right hand, hold it a hand's breadth above the table, and with his eyes on the cup he would say the grace 'for all' (i.e. in the name of all). In Jesus' day the grace was probably worded thus: 'Blessed art Thou O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who feedest the whole world with goodness, with grace and with mercy. We thank Thee, O Lord our God, that Thou hast caused us to inherit a good and pleasant land. Have mercy, O Lord our God, on Israel Thy people, and on Jerusalem, Thy city, and upon Zion, the dwelling place of Thy glory, and upon Thy altar and upon Thy temple. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, Thou who buildest Jerusalem.' Those at table would make the prayer their own by saying Amen.

It is not difficult to see in this, from the introductory dialogue onwards, the embryo of later eucharistic prayers. The point I wish to stress at the moment is that this *eucharistia* is a blessing. Gratitude, giving of thanks, is not the dominant note. This is blessing. We recognize moreover from other blessings of this kind a basic structure. Exod. 18:9-10 provides an example. Moses recounts the mighty acts of God in the Exodus and Jethro replies with a blessing: 'Blessed be the Lord who hath delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of Pharaoh, who hath delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods.' Often as in I Chr. 16:4-38 there is a recapitulation at the end of the actual words 'blessed art Thou' as in the Passover grace. We have already noted the Greek use of the word *eucharistia* for the grateful recognition of some sort of deliverance. This is the emphasis of the Jewish blessings. Not so much gratitude as recognition is the keynote, recognition or anamnesis of the action of God, comprehending gratitude and a confession of faith. This is exactly what we see reproduced in the early eucharistic prayers.

But not only is there carried over into the Christian Eucharist something of the form and perhaps content of a Jewish blessing or grace at the Passover table, there will also have been carried over the theology of the Christian practice of saying grace at a meal, clear evidence of which we have in I Tim. 4:3-5. The passage deals with certain false teachers, 'seducing spirits', who are noted for 'speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received *meta eucharistias* (A.V. with thanksgiving) of them which believe and know the truth'. Then it goes on: 'For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused, if it be received *meta eucharistias*. For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.' Food is sanctified by grace at table. By this grace the food about to be eaten which originates in God's good creation is removed from the context of the

fallen world and set in the context of the redeemed world. In Christ everything is again very good. This sanctification is effected, the text says, by the word of God and prayer. The meaning of the reference to prayer is obvious – the prayer of the grace. But what is the meaning of ‘by the word of God’? It would appear that there must have been a Christian custom of associating with the prayer of the grace a quotation from Scripture.

This sanctifying property of the grace is of the greatest importance for the understanding of the nature of the *eucharistia* of the early Eucharist. The Lord’s Supper is a meal. For the early Church a meal without a grace would be unthinkable. They would automatically think of sanctifying the food for the meal by the word of God and prayer. With Christ’s own example before them they say a *eucharistia* (as we have seen). This *eucharistia* will undoubtedly be a grateful recognition and anamnesis of God’s mighty acts (including the Christ event) shot through perhaps with confession of faith. This *eucharistia*, though addressed to God, is nevertheless related to the cup, ‘the cup of blessing which we bless’, as is the *eucharistia* proper to the bread related to the bread. This in the case of the Eucharist is the prayer which sanctifies. What is the word of God that sanctifies? What more natural than that this should be Our Lord’s words of institution! It is significant that the words of institution appear in the course of almost all ancient eucharistic prayers (the Liturgy of Adai and Mari is an uncertain exception).

The *eucharistia* of the Eucharist therefore is the Christian grace, the Christian blessing *par excellence*, spoken at the Christian meal *par excellence*, blessing its food.

There follows from this a dogmatic and liturgical problem – the problem of the Epiclesis. If the food is sanctified by the blessing and the words of institution it may be asked what need is there for an Epiclesis. We cannot take time here to tackle the question in depth. The quick answer is that the dogmatic difficulty is more apparent than real. It is the Church or the representative of the Church who, as the representative of Christ, sanctifies in the words of Christ and in prayer; but the Church remains Church and Christ remains Lord. In the light of our proper care not to abuse the idea of the real presence nor to be guilty of an *ex opere operato* consecration there is no contradiction in praying a prayer of consecration or an Epiclesis calling on God to send down His Holy Spirit ‘to sanctify both us and these Thy own gifts of bread and wine which we set before Thee that the bread. . . .’

The liturgical problem is where to place the Epiclesis. If the *eucharistia* including the words of institution can be presented as a unified whole in which the work of the Spirit is everywhere implicit then there is no difficulty and the placing of the Epiclesis scarcely

matters. Again if there underlies the *eucharistia* a trinitarian schema then the Epiclesis after the words of institution may perhaps be justified, but if the clarity of this unity schema should fade then the placing of the Epiclesis after the words of institution can lead to error as it has done in the past in the east and a position before the words of institution is to be preferred. Perhaps it is significant that liturgical documents from Egypt do show that there the Epiclesis was originally before the words of institution. But we stray too far from our course. We have noted that the *eucharistia* of the Church was in the nature of a grace or blessing, having the properties of a grace or blessing. This was the heart of the Eucharist.

At this stage we must take courage and venture out into the vast bewildering area of early Christian liturgical development. A comprehensive account of this is again far beyond the scope of this paper.

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Only one or two marks of the early liturgies and of their development can be noted. Let me hasten to add that they are noted not out of antiquarian interest but out of that evangelical and pastoral concern which is the true impetus to all modern liturgical reform.

One notes for example the movement of the emotional centre of gravity from a grateful, confessional Anamnesis to petition, or to state it in another way one notes a decline in emotional intensity in the *eucharistia* proper and a growing interest in the elements and what happens to them. The Epiclesis in the east and the canon of the Mass in the west assume very great importance. Eventually from the ninth century onwards the *eucharistia* proper in the Preface suffers considerable curtailment and is completely overshadowed by the canon.

Now at the present time and particularly in our own Church of Scotland context it seems to me we still suffer from this displacement of the emotional centre of gravity. Our order in the Book of Common Order has considerable merits. Its Anamnesis of the mighty acts of God is infinitely superior to the fragmented Preface of the Roman rite. It is in fact much more akin to the Eastern rite. And yet set our Church of Scotland Order alongside that of Hippolytus or that of Serapion and there can be no doubt that there has been loss. We miss the climactic christological intensity of Hippolytus (Hippolytus' Order is circa A.D. 215 – the oldest known Western liturgy).

The Order of Serapion from his Euchlogion (middle of the fourth century) is Eastern in character. The Anamnesis is more comprehensive, but there is still an intensity about it, inspired by the Holy Spirit, which reaches a splendid high point in the Sanctus.

The model for our Church of Scotland Order has been a later liturgy where the Sanctus occurs in the middle of the Anamnesis of God's mighty acts, which position is hard to justify or at least not half so impressive theologically as the more archaic position at the climax of the blessing. Liturgically there may be two factors to consider. One is the influence of the Jewish original. The part which we would now call the Pre-Sanctus may have been as we suggested earlier an amended Jewish original with Sanctus. The other factor is the shift of interest to the Epiclesis.

Our current problem, it seems to me, is to recover the true spirit of the *eucharistia*. Because it is only imperfectly interpreted in our order we too have tended to place the emotional centre of gravity elsewhere. I am thinking of the recurring emphasis in our Communion Service on offering and sacrifice, in particular the offering and sacrifice that we make. Let me recall snatches at least of our Book of Common Order Service. From the short prayers said when the Elements have been brought to the Table: 'that we, approaching Thee with pure heart and cleansed conscience, may offer unto Thee a sacrifice in righteousness': again 'we offer unto Thee this bread and this cup': now from the part of the Great Prayer which follows the Epiclesis and precedes the Lord's Prayer: 'and here we offer and present unto Thee ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy and living sacrifice, and we beseech Thee mercifully to accept this our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, as, in fellowship with . . .' The theme recurs in the post-Communion prayer: 'and we most humbly beseech Thee, O Heavenly Father, to receive us as now again we dedicate ourselves to Thee. . . .' I daresay that each of these offertory and dedicatory modes of expression taken by itself could be defended theologically. What we have to ask is whether taken together these expressions do not create a dangerous theological imbalance which can only be rectified when the *eucharistia* proper bears clear and grateful and confessional witness to the one sacrifice which is the mainspring of all our life and worship. There is a danger that we are so eloquent about the offerings we make, bread and wine, or ourselves, our souls and bodies, and so reticent about the sacrifice of Christ as almost to be Pelagian. 'All things come of Thee and our only offering is to recall Thy gifts and marvellous works.' So, splendidly, the liturgy of Taizé. Let me quote also the Archbishop of Canterbury: 'transcending all that we can try to bring and to offer there is the one offering of Christ's broken body and outpoured blood which we plead for ourselves and for the human race'. Where in the great Eucharistic prayer there is a sufficient Anamnesis of the Christ event then through Christ, who is ultimately the true worshipper, through Christ and by that prayer, that Christian grace, we can be brought into the context of grace,

in which we hide ourselves, lose ourselves, enter into a perfect exchange of grace and praise.

‘Look Father look on His anointed face;
And only look on us as found in Him.’

The emotional centre of gravity must return to the place where historically and theologically and liturgically it belongs, to the *eucharistia*, the grateful, confessional anamnesis of the Great Prayer.

There is one further characteristic mark of nearly all versions of the early liturgies to which I should like to refer and that is what one might call the confessional sufficiency of the *eucharistia*. Undeniably in the first four centuries there was a tireless searching after that sufficiency for no two generations interpreted it alike, but equally a sufficiency of one kind or another was there from the start. The process of change and development no doubt kept pace with the development of confessional formulae from the simple *Kurios Christos* to the elaborate trinitarianism of the creeds as we know them but there never was, so far as we can judge, any question of reciting a Creed at the Eucharist. Creeds are proper to the Sacrament of Baptism. The Nicene Creed, the product of the Council of Nicaea (A.D. 425), was never intended to be inserted in the Liturgy and its introduction in the middle of the fifth century was, according to Gregory Dix, more an accident of history than anything else. The practice was not adopted in Rome until the eleventh century.

Today the Creed is a greater problem than ever. It has always been difficult to know where in the liturgy to place it because it really does not belong there, but today it must seriously be asked whether it has a place any more. In modern worship tedious repetition is intolerable, and this seems unavoidable if in a Service of Holy Communion we have the recitation of the Nicene Creed followed soon afterwards by a Great Prayer again constructed on a trinitarian basis.

Now the inclusion of the Creed will be defended for pastoral reasons – that in this age of spiritual bankruptcy there is great strength in a public confession of the faith and there is substance in the contention. One fears, however, that its inclusion will be at the expense of the Great Prayer. Anticipating the confessional element of the *eucharistia* it cannot but detract from the bravery of the *eucharistia*. Nor can it seriously be claimed that the Nicene Creed matches any of the great Eucharistic prayers of the Church. It hirlples along in theological fussiness. Any aesthetic quality it possesses has been lent to it by certain musical settings of great beauty. We can all recollect breath-taking renderings of the words ‘et homo factus est’ for

‘Music, when soft voices die
Vibrates in the memory.’

But that does not make the Nicene Creed a lyrical set of words and the true *eucharistia* of the Church, gratitude, anamnesis and confession, ought to be lyrical with the lyricism of the Holy Spirit and of all the saints and angels of God.

If however, after all, the pastoral argument for the inclusion of the Creed succeeds then surely the opportunity must be taken to find a *eucharistia* which, like that say of Hippolytus, in its brevity and christological intensity, forms a proper contrast to the trinitarianism of the Creed.

One last but not least word. I have tried to indicate the liturgical consciousness of the Church of the days closest to Our Lord, and to show that it was through and through a Eucharistic consciousness. How long I wonder can we who march under the banner of the Reformation and protest a four-hundred-year-old intention to reform the Church and restore its true face, how long can we in the Church of Scotland go on ignoring that ubiquitous and prevailing Eucharistic consciousness?

Again we have sought to identify the true character of the *eucharistia*, noting the things which threaten it today. We have found features not unfamiliar to our own weekly worshippers, for in most services we move towards some form of grateful confessional anamnesis. How strange that we should not go on to take in our hands as the natural complement of our Eucharistia 'the signs of the eternal sacrifice of Christ, unique and perfect, living and holy, the bread of life which cometh down from heaven and the cup of the feast in Thy Kingdom'.

That most liturgical of all scriptural books, the Book of Revelation, pulsates with eucharistic devotion and with a strange and beautiful insistence cries again and again Maranatha, 'Come. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.' Nearer our own day George Herbert took up the same refrain:

Come my way, my Truth, my Life:
Such a Way, as gives us Breath:
Such a Truth, as ends all Strife:
Such a Life as killeth Death.

Come my Light, my Feast, my Strength:
Such a Light, as shows a Feast:
Such a Feast, as mends in length:
Such a Strength, as makes his quest.'

Pray God we may all one day recover Eucharistia.

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