

# **Resolving Liturgical Incommensurability in Ecumenical Worship Contexts: A Hermeneutical Framework for Reconciling Anaphoral Divergence Between Eastern and Western Eucharistic Traditions**

**Casey Roberts**

Professor

University of Tübingen

Geschwister-Scholl-Platz, 72074 Tübingen, Baden-Württemberg, Germany

**Kim Wilson**

Associate Professor

Saint Paul University

223 Main Street, Ottawa, Ontario K1S 1C4, Canada

**Nico Edwards**

PhD

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

University Campus, 54124 Thessaloniki, Central Macedonia, Greece

**Abstract.** Liturgical incommensurability between Eastern Orthodox anaphoral structures and Western Roman Rite Eucharistic prayers presents persistent challenges for ecumenical worship communities seeking sacramental coherence. This study examines the doctrinal, textual, and rubrical sources of divergence across six canonical anaphoral traditions, employing comparative liturgical theology and historical-critical hermeneutics. Drawing on the Lima Document, the Balamand Statement, and contemporary post-conciliar reform texts, the paper proposes a structured hermeneutical framework that identifies zones of legitimate liturgical convergence without compromising confessional integrity. Analysis reveals that epicletic sequencing and anamnestic formulation constitute the primary loci of irreconcilability, while doxological structures offer underexplored convergence potential. The proposed framework provides practical guidance for ecumenical liturgical commissions navigating sacramental theology disputes in pluralistic congregational settings.

**Keywords:** liturgical incommensurability, anaphoral theology, ecumenical hermeneutics, Eucharistic epiclesis, comparative liturgical studies, sacramental convergence, Eastern Orthodox rite, post-conciliar reform, doxological structuralism

## **Introduction**

The fragmentation of Eucharistic practice across Christian confessional traditions remains one of the most theologically consequential and pastorally unresolved problems in contemporary ecumenism. As of the mid-2020s, the accelerating formation of interdenominational faith communities—particularly in urban diaspora contexts across Western Europe, North America, and Sub-Saharan Africa—has placed unprecedented

pressure on liturgical commissions to produce worship frameworks capable of accommodating divergent sacramental theologies without dissolving the doctrinal boundaries that define confessional identity. The challenge is not merely ceremonial or aesthetic; it is structurally embedded in the anaphoral architectures that encode the respective communities' theologies of Real Presence, sacrificial memorial, and pneumatological agency. Anaphoral divergence between Eastern traditions—including the Byzantine Rite anaphoras of Saint Basil and Saint John Chrysostom—and Western Eucharistic Prayers I through IV of the Roman Rite reflects centuries of theological sedimentation. The epicletic placement controversy, wherein Eastern traditions position the invocation of the Holy Spirit as the consecratory apex while Latin theology historically privileges the dominical Words of Institution, has been extensively documented yet insufficiently resolved at the level of practical liturgical governance. Similarly, divergence in anamnetic formulation—specifically, whether the memorial extends prospectively to the Parousia—creates asymmetries in eschatological framing that render full liturgical interchangeability canonically untenable under current Roman, Orthodox, and Anglican magisterial positions. Despite the groundbreaking contributions of the Faith and Order Commission's Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry document (1982) and subsequent bilateral dialogues, including the North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation, no operational hermeneutical framework has been established to guide local ecumenical bodies in adjudicating specific points of liturgical incommensurability with theological rigour. Existing proposals tend either toward maximalist convergence—effectively suppressing confessional distinctives—or minimalist co-existence models that preclude genuine sacramental participation across traditions. This gap constitutes the precise practical challenge the present article addresses. The relevance of this problem has intensified in the 2024–2026 period in light of the ongoing Synodal process within the Roman Catholic Church, renewed Anglican-Lutheran full communion implementations, and the proliferation of hybrid congregational models in post-secular societies. Ecumenical liturgical commissions increasingly require structured, academically grounded instruments for navigating these disputes rather than ad hoc pastoral accommodations. This article proceeds as follows: Section 2 maps the historical genealogy of anaphoral divergence across the identified traditions. Section 3 applies historical-critical hermeneutics to the primary liturgical texts. Section 4 introduces the proposed convergence framework, delineating zones of permissible adaptation from zones of confessional inviolability. Section 5 tests the framework against three documented ecumenical case studies. Section 6 presents conclusions and recommendations for liturgical commissions.

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## References

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