

Responding to “Open Communion”

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“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread. ... For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes. Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep [i.e., have died]” (1 Cor. 10:16-17; 11:23-30).

In recent years, the Anglican Continuum has re-established “*Communio in Sacris*.” We are in “full Communion” with one another. *Communicatio in sacris* (“communication in sacred things”), common participation in religious acts, is used interchangeably with *communicatio in divinis* (“communication in divine things”). In a narrower sense it means full sacramental sharing, including but not restricted to receiving the Eucharist.

The word “communion” (weakly translated as “fellowship”) is, in Greek, *koinonia*. It means participation. It is *metalepsis*, sharing in the Body and Blood of Jesus. The phrase *santium communio* (Communion of saints, Greek *hagion koinonian*) in the Apostles’ Creed also refers to the Eucharist. By extension it’s more widely used to mean the entire Church united with Jesus. To share in the Eucharist together means **to share both contact with the glorified Flesh and Blood of God, and to publicly confess agreement with the teaching of the Church.** Such agreement was also expressed along with a mutual forgiveness among the people by the “kiss of peace” (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20. etc.) before going to Communion. This is also what St. John means in 2 John 1:10-11. “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.” Such reception into the local house church is a matter of admission to the Eucharist, not about being rude to the

Mormons at the door of your private house. For a major treatment of the Church’s historic practice see the book by Elert.

“Open Communion” means that reception of the Eucharist is open to anyone whatsoever. The Church has never practiced this. The Church’s practice is “Closed Communion.” Reception of the Eucharist is restricted to those who are able to receive Christ’s Body and Blood worthily and without engaging in making a public statement which is a lie. Receiving Communion in a given Church makes a public statement of agreement with the teachings of that Church. It shows that we agree in our understanding of the dogmas of the Church, expressed in the Ecumenical Creeds, holding the same Faith. That is why re-establishing *Communio in sacris* is a necessary prelude to organic unity. This doesn’t mean every minute doctrinal matter has been absolutely decided in the exact same way. It means we hold everything within the boundaries of the Analogy of Faith, the Church’s creeds as historically understood. Those allowed to commune at our altars must be validly baptized, confirmed (or desiring to be), not in a state of mortal sin, and must believe in the real, objective bodily Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.

A major element of Closed Communion is the consequences of unworthy reception. The results of taking the Lord’s Body and Blood into oneself unworthily are very serious. “Worthy” participation doesn’t mean one is sinless; the Banquet is for repentant sinners. But it does mean that one recognizes (“discerns”) the Lord’s Body. This is not a full intellectual grasp of the Mystery of the Eucharist. If that were required, no one could receive. Various ways of accurately explaining the unique mode of Jesus’ glorified Body and Blood in the Eucharist have been used, but none of these is binding on the consciences of the faithful. But we do NOT believe in some ethereal “presence.” As Elizebeth I said, “’Twas God the Word that spake it, He took the bread and brake it; And what the Word did make it; That I believe, and take it.” The term for “discerning” means a yes or no, pass or fail kind of recognition. Is this Jesus? Are His Words “This is My Body... This is My Blood” true? We cannot, on pain of endangering precious souls, allow those who reject the plain meaning of Jesus’ Words to receive Holy Communion because they would receive unworthily- eat and drink “judgment” on themselves. Communion isn’t coffee hour, a matter of mere hospitality. The Stewards of God’s Mysteries, the parish priests, guard the Sacred Body and Blood, and care for souls by instructing them until they’re ready to confess the faith of Jesus’ Church. We do this out of love for Jesus and for all people.

Suggested Reading:

Elert, Werner. *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries*. Trans. Norman Nagel. Concordia Publ. House, 1966. Repr. 2003.