

INFANT COMMUNION: PAST TRADITION AND PRESENT PRACTICE

Objections to the practice of infant baptism are being heard more frequently today from contemporary Catholic theologians, and not merely from such churches as the Baptists.¹ The desire to have more attention paid to the capacity of the person being baptized to believe has led them to suggest other ways of initiating the catechumen into the Christian family instead of the present baptismal ceremony. They suggest that there could be an early blessing for the infant catechumen, which some refer to as "consignation," and this would express the reception by the family into whose faith the person is welcomed, at the same time leaving the actual act of belief by the catechumen till later.² This is in harmony with the present tendency among Christians to value personal judgment in the matter of religious conviction, for it does recognize a person's inalienable right to make decisions which affect the commitment at depth in matters of religion.

On the other hand, there are those theologians who have a healthy appreciation of the traditional practice of the Church in the matter of infant baptism, and they give strong arguments for the retention of the traditional practice based on the "faith of the Church" with regard to the candidates for baptism: the "faith of the Church" supplies what is lacking in the conscious response of the catechumens. In such a case, the baptized person will make an act of faith later on in the Trinitarian work of redemption, according to the Christian revelation, because of the theological gifts personally communicated at baptism. Thus the "faith of the Church" would be expressed at baptism, but appropriated at a later date by a judgment of personal faith, when the candidate for the "act of faith" reaches the age of reason. In other words, the baptized person will "accept" (or refuse), at the age of reason, the Christian status, namely, the invitation to live as an adopted child of God the Father, through the Spirit, as a result of having been immersed into the saving death and resurrection of the living Christ, and so grow in grace towards the kingdom.

¹ Richard X. Redmond, S.S., says that a radical solution to the problems of infant baptism, "increasingly proposed by Catholics and Protestants, suggests formally initiating infants into the catechumenate but not actually baptizing them till a later age, which would be decided by the child, his parents, and the community itself" ("Infant Baptism: History and Pastoral Problems," *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* 30 [1969] 89). He also refers to articles by McClendon and Hurley, and to a book by D. Moody, *Baptism: Foundation for Christian Unity* (Philadelphia, 1967).

² The problem of infant baptism is particularly acute as regards the children of interchurch marriages. A number of contemporary theologians suggest that a ceremony of "bidenominal consignation" be substituted for baptism. Cf. Nicholas Lash's comment in *One in Christ* 5 (1969) 89.

But if baptism is orientated towards the end-times, it shares the eschatological character of the other sacraments, and so it cannot be isolated from the other two sacraments of Christian initiation, namely, confirmation and Eucharist. Therefore, the question must be raised as to the theoretical possibility of the reception of these two sacraments by any baptized person because of the "faith of the Church," and not necessarily because they fulfil the prior condition of having the intelligence to understand the significance of confirmation or the Eucharist.³ The traditional practice of the Roman Catholic Church has been to confirm and, of course, baptize babies in cases of emergency: no priest would refuse to confirm a baby because of its inability at the time to understand the sacredness of the sacrament. But many priests would object to giving a baby Communion. For these priests, the efficaciousness of the "faith of the Church" with regard to infant baptism and confirmation cannot be extended to the Eucharist, since for them the Eucharistic sign must be "understood" by the person being communicated.

It is the purpose of this article to show that the Church's faith extends to the whole rite of Christian initiation, namely, baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist; that, as a matter of historical fact, the Church has given Communion to those who were mentally incapable of understanding the meaning of the Eucharist; that this is verified historically for the first twelve centuries of the Christian era.⁴ It may surprise some readers to realize the extensive literature that is available on the subject of infant Communion.⁵ Much of it will be ignored

³ One of the English bishops (Alan Clark, Auxiliary of Northampton) admitted to me recently that he would like to see babies confirmed when they are baptized. As with baptism, the theological basis for such a practice would be the ecclesiological "faith of the Church." The difficulty remains as to why one has to stop short at confirmation, and not include the Eucharist, for the same ecclesiological reason. The purpose of this article is to attempt to provide the historical proof that the Church has admitted the validity of giving Communion to those who are, humanly speaking, incapable of understanding the significance of what they are receiving, whether this incapacity is temporary or permanent, as, e.g., in the case of the mentally deficient, since what is being expressed in such a case is the Church's belief and hope for these children, and their part in the plan of salvation.

⁴ Psychologists might find it possible to draw attention to the value and importance of infant Communion for the child, according to the elementary principles of normal child-development. The pastoral theologian could show the great good that would accrue to contemporary Christian family life if infant Communion were widespread, and the "initiation" were into the deeper meaning of the sacraments, rather like the child's initiation into the mysteries of family meals. There is a close parallel between ordinary human development and sacramental development.

⁵ Some of the relevant literature on the subject is given here, and is arranged in alphabetical (author) order: L. Andrieux, *La première communion* (Paris, 1911); F. X.

for the purposes of this article, but it is available in specialist libraries. Only such books or articles that illustrate the general thesis about the Church's practice of infant Communion for the first twelve centuries will be used and quoted.

It must be stated here that the early Church had no rite of infant baptism: the catechumenate was for adults; children were initiated into the life of the Church in the simplest possible way. So if it is true to say that the revised *Ordo baptismi parvulorum* (Vatican City, 1969) must be placed in the context of the revised adult catechumenate, which is in the process of being restored, then infant Communion must be placed in the context of adult Communion, especially during the first millennium of Christianity.⁶ The tradition of the Church has always been to allow baptized adults to take their full part in Eucharistic worship by their reception of Holy Communion. The discipline of the Church has remained the same up to the present day: immediately after baptism the neophyte shares at Mass as a full member of the Church by receiving Communion. An *Ordo Romanus* of about the sixth-seventh century gives the following direction: "...et communicant omnes ipsi infantes," without specifying what precisely is meant by "infantes."⁷ Whether or not this refers explicitly to infants, since all would-be Christians were spoken of as "infants" from the point of view of their newly-found faith, liturgical scholars are in no doubt as to the practice of children's Communion from the very beginning of authentically verifiable Church history. For instance, G.

Bauer, "Zur Geschichte der feier. Kindererskommunion," *Theologie und Glaube* 25 (1933) 563-90; J. Baumgärtler, *Die Erstkommunion* (Munich, 1929); J. B. Bossuet, *Traité de la communion sous les deux espèces* (1682); P. Browe, "Die Kinderkommunion im Mittelalter," *Scholastik* 5 (1930) 1-45; P. Browe, "Die Taufkommunion," *Die Pflichtkommunion im Mittelalter* (Münster, 1940) 129-42; E. Dublanchy, "Communion eucharistique (sous les deux espèces)," *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* 3 (1908) 552-72; F. Gillmann, "Die anni discretionis," *Archiv für katholisches Kirchenrecht* 108 (1928) 556-617; 110 (1930) 187-92; H. A. Heiser, *Die Kinderkommunion in Geist der Kirche*, 3 vols. (Vienna, 1926-32); P. Hellbernd, *Die Erstkommunion der Kinder in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Vechta, 1954); A. G. Martimort, *L'Eglise en prière* (Paris, 1961); Burkhard Neunheuser, *Baptism and Confirmation* (New York, 1964); J. M. R. Tillard, *The Eucharist* (Staten Island, 1967). Apart from other references, which will be given in the footnotes, the two following publications should be noted: *Ecumenical Studies: Baptism and Marriage*, ed. Michael Hurley (Dublin, 1968), and "Baptiser des petits enfants?" (*Materiaux pour une recherche. Supp. à "Eglise d'Arras"; Cahiers du Livre*, 1969).

⁶ See Vatican II documents: Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, no. 14; Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, no. 6; Constitution on the Liturgy, no. 64. All deal with the restoration of the *adult* catechumenate, its importance, and the duty of those who introduce others to the "faith of the Church" in Christ's redemptive plan.

⁷ See M. Andrieu, *Les Ordines Romani du haut Moyen-âge* 2 (Louvain, 1948) 446.

Jacquemet says that Communion was for a long time part of the rites of Christian initiation, and so whenever little children were baptized, they made their first Communion in the first days of their life.⁸ Documentary evidence for this statement may be found in the writings of St. Cyprian,⁹ St. Augustine,¹⁰ the Sacramentary of St. Gregory the Great,¹¹ and the ancient *ordines* of Rome.¹² The authority and abundance of extant evidence which witness to the practice of the Church at Rome compelled the author of the article on "First Communion" in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* to affirm:

Almost all ancient ritual books until the 13th century in the West prescribe that children are to be admitted to Communion at Baptism; in the East as well as in some Latin countries this practice is still maintained. Following their first reception, usually under the species of wine, infants were allowed to receive frequently, sometimes after the clergy and sometimes after all adults. Reaction to the Arian controversy . . . increased emphasis on adoration of the divinity present, and had the result of lessening the frequency of Communion and of preventing children from receiving it until after they had had some Christian instruction upon attaining the age of reason.¹³

Nevertheless, it is true to say that up to the twelfth century all the faithful, even in the Latin Church, communicated under both species.

For the Christian, "communion" with Christ involves "communion" with fellow Christians, and so the nature of the Eucharistic sign, namely, the meal (cf. Jn 6:26-63), demands that no Mass be without a Communion, at least by someone who in some way represents the people. This is usually the priest, though sometimes it is the deacon—as in the Coptic rite.¹⁴ But Communion has never been limited to those who were present at Mass: in every age, even the very earliest period of Christianity, Communion under one or other species, usually bread, has been taken to those who were absent from the Eucharistic assembly. Such people were unable to share the worship of the Church because of their circumstances, either due to illness or because of prison sentences or some similar reason. Christians would have been

⁸ "Communion eucharistique," *Catholicisme* 2, 1383-84.

⁹ *PL* 4, 380, 484-85; and *CSEL* 3, 255 (*De lapsis* 25).

¹⁰ *PL* 33, 361; 33, 984; 38, 944; 45, 1154. Baumgärtler maintains that Communion at baptism only began at the time of St. Augustine (*op. cit.*, pp. 30 ff.). The contrary view is held in *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 54 (1930) 627 ff. In this matter see also L. Eisenhofer, *Handbuch der katholischen Liturgik* 2 (Freiburg, 1932) 265 ff.

¹¹ *PL* 78, 90.

¹² 1, 46 (*PL* 78, 957-58) and 8, 12 (*PL* 78, 1000).

¹³ Sister Maria Assunta Werner, C.S.C., "Communion, First," *NCE* 4 (1967) 37.

¹⁴ "Communion under Both Kinds," *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford, 1961) pp. 320-21.

able to communicate themselves at home in those days, since reservation of the Blessed Sacrament was not limited in those early days to any one house: all Christian homes could have reservation precisely because Christians were present in them, and the real presence of Christ in the Eucharistic signs was for the benefit of the real presence of Christ in the Spirit's human signs, namely, Christians. It seems that the sick and the children were habitually communicated under one kind only. In the case of infants, this was in the form of wine.¹⁵ Clearly, it was necessary to keep the Eucharistic species for the sick, for the daily celebration of Mass must have been either nonexistent or at any rate an unusual event in those days. For the same reason, it would have seemed natural for the faithful to reserve the Sacrament in their homes. But the problem remained as to what to do with the superabundance of the sacred species after a reasonable portion had been set aside for the sick, and how to do so decently and reverently. In fourth-century Syrian Antioch, for instance, the deacons were required to take the sacramental remains to the sacristy, without any further specific instructions as to their disposal. An excessive surplus of sacred species must have caused great embarrassment! The *Sahidic Canons*, too, contained warnings of dire punishments from God if clerics were so careless in their calculations as to have an excess of the sacred species. The Bible seemed to provide a sure guide for disposing of excess species, and the remains were burnt, according to the prescriptions of Lv 8:32. It is indisputable that uneatable hosts were disposed of in this way in the seventh and eighth centuries. Sometimes these incinerated elements were preserved as relics. Only very few places were able to use consecrated elements on the following day, and these were mainly places of pilgrimage and popularity such as the basilica in Jerusalem.¹⁶

There were other practical problems which caused some concern as regards the surplus of species. The frequency of consecrating surplus elements and the need to renew the reserved Sacrament—made available, at least under one kind, to those who were unable to be present at Mass, such as the sick, prisoners, and those who through force of circumstances had to receive Communion at home—focused attention on the great divergence of practice as to the time of consecration, where the surplus of elements would have been either unforeseen, due to the fewness of communicants who actually received Communion, or intended, for the sake of communicating those not at the common

¹⁵ Joseph A. Jungmann, *Missarum sollemnia* 3 (Paris, 1956) 342–43.

¹⁶ Johannes Betz, "Eucharist," *Sacramentum mundi* 2 (London, 1968) 262.

liturgy.¹⁷ In some places it was the custom to consecrate all the hosts intended for the sick during the year (!) on Maundy Thursday, the commemoration of the Lord's Supper. This was certainly customary in Constantinople, but it was also known in Western Syria about the seventh century, and in England towards the end of the tenth century. Finally, the practice was suppressed in the West once and for all. In the East, however, attempts to repress the practice were more or less successful according to the degree of independence of the local church, for all really practical matters in the end had to be dealt with locally, according to circumstances. In Constantinople, in the sixth century, it was decided to gather the little children on certain days in the church so that they could consume the species left over from Eucharistic liturgies, which were in excess of what was needed for Communion outside Mass.¹⁸ This assertion is substantiated by documentary evidence which is completely trustworthy.¹⁹ The practice of giving children Communion must have been sufficiently widespread, since it is found at Macon in 585 A.D. (see Mansi 9, 952): "...le mercredi et le vendredi, il faut faire venir les enfants et leur remettre *reliquias conspersas vino*."²⁰ It could not have been easy to give Communion to an infant or child from the feeding point of view. Various methods were used after the tenth century to give Communion under one kind to newly-baptized children: for example, the finger of the priest or parent was dipped into the precious blood, and a few drops were put on the infant's tongue. In some cases, a leaf ("feuille") was used for the purpose of communicating the child. In other words, right up to the tenth century, Communion had been available to the newly born under two kinds, though normally in the form of wine, and was to continue until the end of the eleventh century, when the practice of Communion under the species of wine was given up *for the faithful*.²¹

The Eastern Church, on the other hand, has remained faithful to the ancient tradition of the Church, so that at the present day little children receive Communion immediately after their baptism, although their second Communion might be much later as a general rule. The timing of the "first" Communion in relation to baptism reflects a theological difference not merely between the Eastern and Western

¹⁷ Jungmann, *op. cit.* 3, 343-44.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ See PG 86, 2769 (Evagrius the Schoolman, *History of the Church* 4, 36) and PG 147, 280 (Nicephorus Calixtus, *History of the Church* 17, 25). Other documents are given by P. Browe in *Theologie und Glaube* 30 (1938) 388-404.

²⁰ *Missarum sollempnia, loc. cit.*

²¹ Cf. PL 161, 94; Martimort, *op. cit.*, p. 565.

Church, but also between present practice and that of the first millennium. So while the Eastern Churches have kept their ritual of baptismal Communion, whether for adults or infants, the Western Church had the tradition for a long time of giving Communion after baptism or after confirmation, even when the baptism of adults became rarer and the initiation rites for the baptism of children were being formed.²²

In summing up this part of the essay, one is forced to conclude that during the first twelve centuries of the Christian era Communion was given to children/infants usually under the form of wine.²³ One French liturgical scholar says that the textual evidence for such a practice is overwhelming.²⁴

Liturgists are agreed that infant Communion fell into disuse after the twelfth century,²⁵ and they are also agreed that in the West Communion under two kinds continued until the thirteenth century,²⁶ even though it was in the twelfth century that Communion under two species began to be abandoned. A decisive factor in this abandonment was the dogma that Christ was present *entirely* under *either* species (in theological terms, the doctrine of concomitance).²⁷ The dogmatic justification for Communion under *one* kind—rather than the varied practical reasons for introducing the new, untraditional practice—was that “along with” (*per concomitantiam*) the body (blood) which is present by virtue of transubstantiation “the blood (body), soul, and divinity of Jesus are also present.”²⁸ After the time of Thomas Aquinas,

²² Cf. *PL* 78, 1000.

²³ Cf. Baumgärtler, *op. cit.*, pp. 87–89, 102, and 124 ff.

²⁴ Cf. Dublanchy, *art. cit.*, esp. col. 563: “. . . pendant toute cette période, communion des enfants sous une seule espèce, plus habituellement celle du vin. Sans rapporter les nombreux textes que prouvent le fait de la communion des enfants pendant les douze premiers siècles, nous mentionnerons seulement ceux qui indiquent manifestement l’usage de les communier sous une seule espèce.” Cf. col. 564: “On sait que l’usage de communier les enfants disparût entièrement au XIII^e siècle et qu’il fut alors interdit par plusieurs conciles, notamment par les conciles de Bordeaux et de Bayonne en 1255 et 1300. De tous les documents cités nous pouvons conclure que la communion des enfants, tant qu’elle fut en usage, se fit le plus souvent sous une seule espèce, particulièrement celle du vin.” See also J. A. Jungmann, “Kinderkommunion,” *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* 6 (1961) 154: “Der Priester musste den Kindern wenigstens den in hl. Blut getauchten Finger zum Saugen reichen (so auch in den ausserbyz. Riten des Ostens).”

²⁵ For example, see Jungmann, “Kinderkommunion,” col. 154: “Die Vorschrift wird samt der Bestimmung, dass die Kinder auch in den folgenden sieben Tagen mit den Eltern kommunizieren sollen, in den Ordines der Folgezeit bis ins 12. Jh. weitergegeben. . . .”

²⁶ Martimort, *op. cit.*, p. 426 (so far, Part 1 only has been translated into English: *The Church at Prayer*, London, 1969).

²⁷ See *Missarum sollemnia* 3, 318.

²⁸ Betz, *art. cit.*, p. 262.

therefore, Communion under two kinds went out little by little, and so did children's Communion under the species of wine.²⁹ The Lord's precept "eat and drink" was henceforth generally seen as fulfilled in the reception of both sacred species by the priest alone. Nevertheless, for certain communities reception under two kinds continued until the practice was suppressed a century or two later.³⁰ The transition from Communion under two kinds to Communion under one kind was facilitated by the long-standing traditional practice of giving Communion under one sacred species to very young children and to those who were unable to come to Church. It is ironic that the traditional practice of giving Communion under one kind, for which there are excellent theological and practical reasons, should have resulted in children receiving under no kind at all!³¹

But how was the transition to be made from sharing the "cup" of the Lord to drinking mere wine? It became customary in the thirteenth century to give the ordinary faithful a cup of wine after their Communion under the species of bread. For a long time a little of the precious blood had been mixed with a much larger amount of wine, thereby "consecrating" the whole mixture. Sometimes the wine was "consecrated" by being touched by a particle of the precious bread. So it was relatively easy for the weakened form of "Communion by cup" to become the "ablutions," as we know it. In certain areas, therefore, the transition from "Communion by cup" to washing down with ordinary wine was scarcely perceptible,³² and the reception of

²⁹ *Sum. theol.* 3, q. 80, a. 12.

³⁰ For instance, thirteenth-century Cistercians reserved Communion under two kinds for the ministers at the altar, but this "abuse" was suppressed for them in 1437. In the West different "ordinances" are found which prescribe the reception of the species left over from the liturgy by the clergy present or even by the celebrant himself. The Eastern practice was by and large what it is at present: some of *both* species are reserved, and the rest consumed by one of the concelebrants (cf. *Missarum sollempnia* 3, 343). It is likely that reservation of the sacred species under the form of wine will become more widespread than at present in the Catholic Church, since the sick may ask for, and be allowed, Communion under the species of wine when "they express a wish to do so for their own spiritual good," and not merely because they cannot otherwise receive Communion. See *Canon Law Digest* 22 (1969) no. 2, for an abstract of E. F. Regatillo's reply in *Sal terrae* 12 (1968) 872-73: "Comunión con solo sanguis."

³¹ In other words, it was because the Church had been accustomed to give Communion under the form of *wine* to infants that the law abolishing Communion for adults under the form of *wine* meant that infants would no longer receive Communion! The conclusion was simple: no wine, no Communion for infants.

³² Joseph II noted, on May 14, 1783, that it was the custom (an "abuse") in the German Marches to give an infant at Mass, on the eighth day after baptism, a little of the "wine of ablutions." P. O. Seywald, S.J., once said to Jungmann that he remembered when he was a young man, in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, wine was given to infants at home after baptism. The same custom was found in the Cham-

wine at the "ablutions" remains a faint relic of infant Communion.³³

The result of this shift in theological emphasis and pastoral practice meant that the first Communion of children was postponed, and the Eucharist was separated from baptism. Little children were henceforward not compelled to receive Communion until they had reached "the age of discretion," according to the decision of the fourth ecumenical Council of the Lateran, November 11-30, 1215.³⁴ Eleven years before, in 1204, Pope Innocent III had issued a decretal to the effect that wine must be poured into the chalice after the reception of the body and blood of Christ in Communion: "semper sacerdos vino perfundere debet postquam totum acceperit eucharistiae sacramentum," which meant that the celebrant drank the precious blood while the faithful drank ordinary wine from the same cup. Relics of this custom continued up to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,³⁵ and perhaps persist in isolated areas to this day, where they will run into the limited contemporary practice of Communion under two kinds for special occasions.

It is true to say that various factors gave rise to the abandonment of infant Communion between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, some of which were hygienic, some practical, and some dogmatic. More specifically, these were the fear of catching contagious diseases,³⁶

pagne country (cf. Andrieux, *La première communion*, p. 72). In Carinthia, too, there is a custom among the Slovenes of putting some particles of wheat soaked in wine into the infant's mouth (cf. *Missarum sollemnia* 3, 349-50, n. 47).

³³ *Missarum sollemnia* 3, 318, n. 81.

³⁴ Denzinger-Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion symbolorum, definitionum et declarationum* (Freiburg, 1963) 812 (437): "Omnis utriusque sexus fidelis, postquam ad annos discretionis pervenerit, omnia sua solus peccata saltem semel in anno fideliter confiteatur proprio sacerdoti, et iniunctam sibi paenitentiam pro viribus studeat adimplere, suscipiens reverenter ad minus in Pascha Eucharistiae sacramentum. . . ."

³⁵ *Missarum sollemnia* 3, 349-50.

³⁶ Communion under two species has remained the rule for those who belong to the non-Latin (Eastern) rites, but it is normally by way of intinction (the Eucharistic bread is dipped in the wine and then given to the communicant). The Eastern Church presumably feels it has succeeded in overcoming the problems of sharing the "cup of the Lord" by intinction. In the Middle Ages a number of factors combined to hasten the obsolescence of the cup and seemed to suggest other ways of receiving Communion: these were matters of convenience; the risk of upsetting the species of wine by careless handling of the cup; a dislike of drinking from the same cup as others for hygienic reasons; the danger of disease. Of course, some people disliked drinking wine altogether. The Copts, Ethiopians, and Byzantines used a little spoon to put some drops of the precious blood in the mouth of the communicant. Sometimes a tube, or fistula, is used to suck up the wine from the chalice in the Latin Church, in the same way as it was used in the Middle Ages. Other Eastern Christians such as the Syrians practise intinction by dipping the corner of the host in the chalice (cf. Martimort, *op. cit.*, p. 426). It is noteworthy that England was the first country to express care for the reserved Sacra-

the doctrine of concomitance, the demand for intelligent reception of the Eucharist by baptized Christians (this was due partly to different attitudes with regard to confession, partly to counteract "heretical" affirmations, which were seen as attempts to correct the true tradition), and, finally, the traditional practice of giving Communion to those who were unable to attend the Eucharistic assemblies. All these contributed in some way to surrendering a Church tradition which had admirably expressed the faith and love of the Church for her helpless children, whether they were the sick, housebound, prisoners, the aged, or infants, who had been initiated into the whole mystery of Christ's dying and living through the washing with baptismal water, confirmed in their faith which was the faith of the Church, and introduced to the Lord's messianic banquet, the Eucharist. The Catholic tradition had been up till then that even those who did not have the use of reason were able to receive the Eucharist with profit, and for a very long time the Church was accustomed to give children, even infants, Communion at the time of their baptism, and at frequent intervals afterwards.³⁷

Utraquism, the Hussite doctrine that the laity should receive the bread and the wine at every Eucharist, was proposed, defended, and permitted in the first half of the fifteenth century, but lasted little more than a century, until after the end of the Council of Trent. The Fathers of this Council (1545-63), in their decree *super petitione concessionis calicis*,³⁸ expressly left the matter of Communion under two

ment by introducing the praiseworthy custom of renewing the Sacrament every eight or fifteen days, from the time when Aelfric was Archbishop of Canterbury (see *Missarum sollemnia* 3, 343-44).

³⁷ Cf. H. Moureau, "Communion eucharistique (doctrine générale)," *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* 3 (Paris, 1908) 495: "Les enfants baptisés n'ayant pas encore l'âge de raison peuvent recevoir l'eucharistie avec fruit. . . . L'usage de communier les enfants aussitôt après leur baptême a été pendant très longtemps en vigueur dans une grande partie de l'Eglise."

³⁸ For interest, reference could be made to Denzinger-Schönmetzer 1725-34 (929a-37) for the chapters and canons on Eucharistic Communion under two kinds and the Communion of children. The defensive quality of Trent comes through the references and quotations that follow: the preoccupation seems to be less with the dogmatic reasons why the Church gave Communion to children for the first millennium than with a fixation on the requirement that children come to the "age of reason" before receiving the sacraments (other than baptism): *DS* 1730: "Denique eadem sancta Synodus docet, parvulos usu rationis carentes nulla obligari necessitate ad sacramentalem Eucharistiae communionem, siquidem per baptismi 'lavacrum regenerati' (Tit 3:5) et Christo incorporati adeptam iam filiorum Dei gratiam in illa aetate amittere non possunt. Neque ideo tamen damnanda est antiquitas, si eum morem in quibusdam locis aliquando servavit. Ut enim sanctissimi illi Patres sui facti probabilem causam pro illius temporis ratione habuerunt, ita certe illos nulla salutis necessitate id fecisse sine controversia credendum

species "to the mind of the Church," whenever "it should decide" that it was useful. Session 21 (July 16, 1562) gave the doctrinal justification for the limitation of Communion to one species for the Latin Church.

By the time of the Renaissance, the separation of the Eucharist from the other sacraments of Christian initiation was seen in the practice of some countries, for example France, postponing Communion (now, of course, under one kind) beyond the age of eleven.

But not all theologians accepted the change in tradition without a whimper: there were some in the seventeenth century who "commonly admitted" the traditional theology and practice that infants were "capable" (*capax*) of receiving the Eucharist. In the past, Catholic theology admitted that infants can receive all the sacraments except those whose very nature requires the "use of reason," namely, penance, anointing of the sick, and marriage.³⁹ The seventeenth-century theologians saw the Eucharist as the sacrament of "spiritual nourishment," and they argued forcefully that if the Church for so long and so extensively regarded infant Communion as "profitable" for them, then it *must be* profitable for them!⁴⁰

Pius X's document on children's Communion attempted to reverse the trend away from "early" Communion: he restored the "recent" practice of giving Communion to children at the time when they were capable of making a "personal decision" and not at the end of their psychological formation.⁴¹ But the child was to receive some prior catechesis in order to prepare him for the reception of the Eucharist.

est." *DS* 1731: "Si quis dixerit, ex Dei praecepto vel ex necessitate salutis omnes et singulos Christi fideles utramque speciem sanctissimi Eucharistiae sacramenti sumere debere: anathema sit." *DS* 1732: "Si quis dixerit, sanctam Ecclesiam catholicam non justis causis et rationibus adductam fuisse, ut laicos atque etiam clericos non conficientes sub una panis tantummodo specie communicaret, aut in eo errasse: anathema sit." *DS* 1733: This Canon has to do with the truth that the communicant receives the *whole* Christ ("totum et integrum") under *either* species. *DS* 1734: "Si quis dixerit, parvulis, antequam ad annos discretionis pervenerint, necessariam esse Eucharistiae communionem: anathema sit."

³⁹ Cf. Moureau, *art. cit.*, col. 496. It is interesting to note that the sacrament of orders is *not* excluded: in other words, every child could be ordained at baptism! If theologians were to consider the *possibility* of infant ordination, they would probably discover the solution to a great many ecclesiological and ecumenical problems, from the thorny matter of the "validity of orders" to the meaning of Church ministry. This consideration of the *possibility* of infant ordination might also lead to a renewed theology of baptism, particularly its "priestly" character.

⁴⁰ Cf. Moureau, *art. cit.*, col. 496: "Les théologiens arguent de la pratique ancienne d'une grande partie de l'Eglise. Si, en tant d'endroits différents et pendant tant de siècles, on a donné la communion aux enfants, c'est évidemment *dans la persuasion qu'elle leur était profitable*" (my underscoring).

⁴¹ *Ibid.* See also *DS* 3530-36 (2137-44): *Quam singulari*.

If the case was one of danger of death, the child was at the very least to be able to distinguish between the Blessed Sacrament and ordinary food, and to receive Communion with some religious respect. The 1910 document stated, too, that it was the responsibility of parents and confessors to determine the time when the child should be admitted to Communion, but it was the duty of the "parish priest" to control the way children were introduced to the Eucharist. If parents or confessors were neglecting their work in this matter, the "parish priest" was to intervene for the sake of order in Communion practices.⁴²

Generally speaking, the position has not changed since the time of Pius X as regards the Communion of children.

In the case of Communion under two kinds, however, a new era began with the Second Vatican Council under John XXIII, when it allowed Communion under both species in certain specific cases.⁴³ The Constitution on the Liturgy, no. 55, states that "the dogmatic principles which were laid down by the Council of Trent remaining intact,"⁴⁴ Communion under both kinds may be granted when the bishops think fit, not only to clerics and religious, but also to the laity, in cases to be determined by the Apostolic See, as, for instance, to the newly ordained in the Mass of their sacred ordination, to the newly professed in the Mass of their religious profession, and to the newly baptized in a Mass following their baptism."⁴⁵ The fathers of Vatican II clearly regard Communion under one species as dogmatically defensible when it is due to practical considerations, but they affirm that it corresponds less to the ideal liturgical form of Communion.⁴⁶

It may be that as newly-baptized *adults* are now able to receive Holy Communion under two kinds at the time of their baptism, so the Church will reconsider its present rite of *infant* baptism from the

⁴² See the Code of Canon Law 854, none of which is likely to be altered in the revised Code, which is due out any day now.

⁴³ Cf. Betz, *art. cit.*, p. 262.

⁴⁴ See Walter M. Abbott, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York, 1966) p. 156 (and notes). The Tridentine session (21) mentioned was the one referred to above (see n. 38) of July 16, 1562.

⁴⁵ The editor says (n. 46) that although Christ cannot be said to have "ordered" the apostles to "eat and drink," Communion under two kinds is a "fuller expression of the Eucharistic symbolism."—The increasing decentralization in the Church today should make it easier for the episcopal conferences to rediscover their Christ-given authority and evangelical responsibility in reaching courageous decisions in a wide variety of matters, among them the extension of the present legislation about Communion under two kinds. The score of cases to which Communion under two kinds is limited should be broadened. A simple rule could be that Communion under two kinds should be the norm for small assemblies, and the exception for the larger Eucharistic gatherings.

⁴⁶ Cf. Betz, *art. cit.*, p. 266.

point of view of revoking the exclusion from the Eucharist of those infants who have been introduced into the saving plan of Christ through the faith of the Church.⁴⁷ A forceful argument for infant Communion is that if a child is baptized without its being intelligently involved in its baptismal response because of the faith of the Church which "supplies" that response, then it is also because of the faith of the Church, through its faithful concern and love for its new members, that the Church has in the past justifiably initiated little children into the whole mystery of Christ, by confirming and giving them Communion at baptism and at regular intervals afterwards.⁴⁸ It is with some regret, therefore, that one finds in the new *Ordo baptismi parvulorum* (1969) no mention of the ancient practice of infant Communion as an integral part of the rite of initiation: the *Ordo* merely states that parents must prepare the newly-baptized for confirmation and the Eucharist, with the help of the "parish priest."⁴⁹ It is recognized that through baptism the "infant" is immersed into the powerful mystery of the suffering, dying, and rising of Christ; that the child "dies" and rises with the *whole* Christ; that the child lives the *one* risen life of Christ's Spirit; that baptism is a paschal (Easter) sacrament; that it should be celebrated in the presence of the local Church, which is assembled liturgically to celebrate the Eucharistic mysteries. And it is not only the faith of the parents and godparents that is important, but the faith of the whole Eucharistic community

⁴⁷ See Paul Tihon, S.J., "Le nouveau rituel du baptême des enfants," *Nouvelle revue théologique* 91 (1969) 653: "C'est ce qu'exprime la doctrine traditionnelle: l'enfant est baptisé en vertu de la foi de l'Eglise. Si on dit parfois: en vertu de la foi de ses parents, c'est là un raccourci qui signifie la même chose: en vertu de la solidarité existentielle avec une communauté croyante bien concrète, dont ses parents sont les membres les plus proches. Le parrainage n'est d'ailleurs qu'une autre manifestation de cette dimension ecclésiale du baptême." For adult Communion under two kinds, see *Missale Romanum: Ordo Missae* (Vatican City, 1969) no. 242: "De iudicio Episcopi, et debita catechesi praemissa communicatio calicis permittitur in sequentibus casibus: I) neophytis adultis in Missa quae Baptismum subsequitur; confirmatis adultis in Missa suae Confirmationis. . . ." There is no mention whatsoever of Communion for those who are children who are baptized and/or confirmed in the present legislation. For further analyses of the new rite of infant baptism, see the articles by L. Ligier, J.-B. Molin, and G. Bequet in *Maison Dieu* 98 (1969) 7-58; and the book *Des chrétiens découvrent le nouveau rituel du baptême des petits enfants* (Paris, 1969).

⁴⁸ It is also in this context that one finds the theological justification for Communion to the mentally handicapped.

⁴⁹ See the *Ordo baptismi parvulorum* (Vatican City, 1969), *Praenotanda* 5, 5: "Post collatum autem Baptismum, parentes, Deo grati susceptoque muneri fideles, parvulum adducere tenentur ad cognoscendum Deum, cuius filius adoptionis factus est, necnon ad Confirmationem suscipiendam et SS. Eucharistiam participandam praeparare. In quo officio iterum a parcho mediis aptis iuventur" (p. 16).

which has gathered in the Lord's name. In other words, the child is baptized *into* a hope and love which reaches out to the mystery of the Trinity through the faith, hope, and love of the Church which assembles in prayer and thanksgiving. As the Constitution on the Liturgy did not expressly exclude the reception of Communion by newly-baptized infants, but left the baptismal rite of infants open to such a development, so the new *Ordo baptismi parvulorum* does not expressly exclude the reception of Communion by newly-baptized infants, but leaves itself open to such a development. But whatever the theological, psychological, liturgical, and ecclesiological reasons why the Church should restore the practice of infant Communion, the fact remains that for well over its first millennium infant Communion expressed the integral relationship between the distinct parts of the rite of Christian initiation.⁵⁰

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⁵⁰ See *ibid.*, p. 7 (*De initiatione christiana: Praenotanda generalia*), where there are some splendid affirmations of the "faith of the Church" in nos. 1 and 2, but the relationship between baptism, confirmation, and the Eucharist is stressed in a way which would have pleased the medieval Christians: "Tria igitur initiationis christianae sacramenta inter se coalescunt, ut ad plenam staturam perducant christifideles, qui missionem totius populi christiani in Ecclesia et in mundo exercent."



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