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**ALL CALLED TO THE BANQUET:
A RE-EVALUATION OF WHO IS INVITED
TO RECEIVE THE BODY AND BLOOD OF
CHRIST AND WHY**

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Abstract

The celebration of the Eucharist is the very summit of the Roman Catholic Church's liturgical life. While the Eucharist as sacrifice has been emphasized almost exclusively until recent times among Catholics, this is not the only way of speaking about or envisioning what happens when the Body of Christ gathers to share bread and wine, his body and blood, "in memory" of Christ. This paper will explore the various options for depicting the Eucharist, arguing that recovering the models of sacred, covenant meal, and healing "food for the journey" for all who are suffering from the effects of sin, provide the opportunity for the Church to expand hospitality to any person who feels compelled to receive the sacrament. Despite the historical precedent for excluding from Eucharistic reception anyone who is not in full agreement with the Bishop of Rome — thereby making reception of the Eucharist a sign of extant communion among those partaking of it — the efficacy of the sacrament to create or bring to life what it signifies is better suited to reconciling groups that are divided and transforming communities from within. Instead of reinforcing the entrenched, dominant positions only, the invitation to universal reception of the Eucharist allows for the presence of the marginalized, dissenting, and prophetic voices in the summative celebration of the

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faith. This results in the welcoming of difference and distinction ritualistically, while preserving unity, which can then emerge more effectively in all areas of Church life.

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I was possibly the only Mormon ever to have attended Our Lady of Sorrows elementary school in Trenton, New Jersey. One might expect that I was marginalized, or at least put frequently on the spot in religion class because of this, but the most distinct memory I have of attending Catholic school was the way in which everyone not only expected, but actually encouraged me enthusiastically, to participate in whatever way I wanted in the school liturgies. Once I was actually asked to lector for mass, and I accepted, feeling that this was a great honour. What I — and perhaps the teacher who had asked me to read — had not anticipated was that the lectors sat with the altar servers and received communion before the whole congregation. I remember Father Sam coming over to us with the large golden bowl full of round wafers, and watching the students next to me receive one when the priest said “The Body of Christ.” When he came to me, I did not know what to do. He said the words, and looked at me oddly, as I hesitated before taking the host — which I promptly placed in the pocket of my school-issued red cardigan. He did not stop me. The rest of the day I carried Jesus around in my pocket. When I got home, for some inexplicable reason, I chose to tell my Grandma (a devoted Catholic) the story. She immediately proceeded to take the host from me and consume it.

Now, 24 years and an RCIA program later, I remember this one relatively trivial incident. I think that that was where my conversion began. I had no idea at the time what the host meant for Catholics — in fact my Latter-Day Saint tradition did not even believe in the Trinity¹ — yet my instinct when presented with the Eucharist was to

¹David L Paulsen and Brett McDonald, “Joseph Smith and the Trinity: An Analysis and Defense of the Social Model of the Godhead,” *Faith and Philosophy* 25, 1 (2008) 47-49. It seems Smith espouses what these writers term a “Social Trinity” theory, which does not conform to the mainline Christian, “Latin Trinity” enunciation of the doctrine. Quoting Smith directly, “I have always and in all congregations when I have preached on the subject of the Deity, it has been the plurality of Gods... I have always declared God to be a distinct personage, Jesus Christ a separate and distinct personage from God the Father, and that the Holy Ghost was a distinct personage and a Spirit: and these three constitute three distinct personages and three Gods.” In Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, ed. Joseph Fielding Smith, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976, 370.

accept it anyway. If I had to do it over again, I don't think I would do anything differently, because my first encounter with the Eucharist began the process of making me into what I received. I cannot pretend that this experience does not lie somewhere at the foundation of the conviction I hold that the Eucharist should be something that all people are invited to share, if they feel so moved.

The Problem

This paper will explore the possibilities in scripture and the tradition that could provide an opening for such a robust sharing of the Body and Blood of Christ, as well as the historical and doctrinal realities that have thus far prevented intercommunion from being the official magisterial position of the Roman Catholic Church. This question of who can receive Eucharist, and under what conditions, is experiencing a new saliency in light of the 2014-2015 Synod on the Family. In an unprecedented fashion, the Church's hierarchy has solicited and is listening to the testimonies of a wide diversity of families as they share the challenges that face them today. Key among the issues raised is the dis-invitation that a large number of Catholics and former Catholics feel in receiving the sacrament of Eucharist. Whether due to divorce and remarriage, cohabitation, same sex relationships, or another ecclesially "irregular" situation, being unable to receive Eucharist due to being in a "state of sin" weakens the strength and resolve of families to grow in holiness. The removal of communal support alienates those most in need from the love and concern of the rest of the Body of Christ, and creates a false sense of consensus and well-being among the community that neither sees, hears, nor helps these marginalized groups because, simply put, they don't show up for mass.

Among Catholics the official position is that one may not come forward to receive Eucharist if one is in a state of mortal sin (defined as serious matter, knowledge that an act is wrong, and full, free consent to engage in it), either temporarily or more permanently because of one's state in life (e.g. divorced and remarried Catholics).²

²This, of course, has become one of the main issues raised by the bishops during the Extraordinary Synod on the Family, called by Pope Francis from 2014-2015. Although the pastoral concerns around ministering to those who are divorced and remarried civilly, without an annulment, are recognized, there seems to be no discussion of the need for a doctrinal reevaluation of who is authorized to receive Eucharist. Giulia Belardelli, "Synod on the Family May Open Door to Changes for Divorcees, Not So Much for Gay Marriage," *Huffington Post* 10/08/2014. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/10/06/synod-on-family-divorce-gay_n_5943020.html

Going to confession and receiving absolution makes one again eligible — as would an extreme situation of urgency, such as receiving at the point of death. The problem arises when one's very being in the world is defined as mortally sinful. Many Catholics find themselves in life-giving second or third marriages, without the possibility of annulment, or in committed same-sex relationships in which both people benefit materially and spiritually.³ This is to say nothing of fellow Christians in good standing, who may attend mass or participate in Catholic communal life, but are also not generally invited to celebrate the Eucharist.⁴ Furthermore, there is no acknowledgement that those outside Christianity altogether may, by the prompting of the Holy Spirit (as I believe was my own case), feel called to receive the Eucharist. There seems to be the tacit assumption that reception of the Eucharist is the crowning event of holiness instead of the impetus and sustenance of a mysterious journey into full communion with God and one another. While we might all acknowledge some level of unworthiness to receive the body and blood of Christ, there is in place the idea that some people are fundamentally not worthy.

A Brief History of Eucharistic Sharing

The sense that one is unworthy to receive communion has been (and in some countries still is) so prevalent that the church actually has to require that believers receive at least once a year.⁵ This is largely the result of an understanding and spirituality that arose in the middle ages in Europe: that the Eucharist was so holy that one ought only *look* at it, but not touch.⁶ This resulted from an emphasis

³L'Osservatore Romano, "Synod on Family: Midterm Report Presented, 2015 Synod Announced," 10/10/2014.http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2014/10/13/synod_on_family_midterm_report_presented,_2015

⁴United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Guidelines for the Reception of Communion," last modified 11/14/1996, accessed 6/29/2015, 2015, <http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/the-mass/order-of-mass/liturgy-of-the-eucharist/guidelines-for-the-reception-of-communion.cfm>.

⁵Also known as the "Easter Duty," this requirement originated with the Fourth Lateran Council (1215 CE), restated in 1983 the Code of Canon Law 920 § 1, and is directly referenced by the Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana ed., 1994, 1389.

⁶Philippe Rouillard, "From Human Meal to Christian Eucharist," in *Living Bread, Saving Cup: Readings on the Eucharist*, ed. R. Kevin Seasoltz, Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1982, 152-153. He writes: "This rarefaction of communion was...inspired by an excessive, or unenlightened, reverence towards the sacramental body and blood of Christ. Perhaps...the struggle against Arianism [and much later

on Eucharist as sacrifice, to the exclusion of other functions of the Eucharist, which were equally represented in scripture and tradition to that point: covenant meal, nourishment, reconciliation, and sign/source of unity.⁷

The Eucharist had, for centuries, been a symbol of unity. One practice, known as *fermentum*, emphasized this. It involved a host being sent by a bishop in one geographic location to another, to be used at the next liturgy in that place, to symbolize the oneness that existed between the congregations, the universal church, and Christ.⁸ To be excommunicated meant to have declared one's self outside of communion with the rest of the Body of Christ — but this was not a punishment, as much as a statement of one's current relationship with the church community, which could be reconciled at any point.⁹ With the Reformation, however, the Eucharist became a way of demonstrating who was “in” and who was “out” of the church community. While some late reformers would develop significantly different theologies of what exactly took place in the consecration (whether and how the bread and wine became *real presence*) and failed to maintain a licit line of succession to the original apostles for ordination, neither Henry VIII, Luther, or Calvin denied “real presence,” *per se*.¹⁰ Furthermore, the exact explanation of what was technically termed “transubstantiation” was (and still is) notoriously difficult to explain or grasp, making one's assent based more on

Jansenism], forcefully exalting the divinity of Christ, filled Christians and especially preachers with such a sacred fear...that people no longer dared to receive the body and blood of God incarnate: somewhat paradoxically the bread of human beings became the ‘bread of angels.’...Contemplation and adoration, with all the liturgical rites which they inspired, took the place of communion,” (152).

⁷Philippe Rouillard, “From Human Meal to Christian Eucharist.” These “sacred meals” are found throughout the Hebrew Bible as well as the Christian Testament.

⁸John F Baldovin, “The Fermentum at Rome in the Fifth Century: A Reconsideration,” *Worship* 79, 1 (Jan 2005) 38-39.

⁹Kenneth Hein, *Eucharist and Excommunication: A Study in Early Christian Doctrine and Discipline*, European University Papers Series 23: Theology, Bern, Switzerland, Frankfurt/M.; Herbert Lang; Peter Lang, 1973, 416-417.

¹⁰William R. Crockett, *Eucharist: Symbol of Transformation*, New York: Pueblo Pub. Co., 1989, Chapters 4-6. There was some criticism of the exclusive use of the image of sacrifice to discuss and depict what happened in the consecration and reject the complex term “transubstantiation” — largely because it seemed to bolster an overemphasis on works instead of grace that several reformers took issue with in the Roman Catholic tradition of the time. The Roman Church responded by doubling down and becoming more entrenched in the images of sacrifice as a way of maintaining identity in opposition to the reformers. Hence the recent need to retrieve the other images of the Eucharist as meal and healing among Catholic liturgists.

docility rather than on understanding.¹¹ In reality, these schisms were more about challenges to papal authority and certain abuses in spirituality or liturgy, but the fact that these broke communion with the Roman Church meant that dissenters could no longer take part in the sacrament of unity *par excellence*. It appears, on some level, to be punitive. The current statement of the Church on who can receive communion bears the marks of this history still: if one does not publicly share the faith of the Catholic Church with regards to the sacrament or papal authority, or if one has broken one's communion with the church community through sin, then one ought not receive. Catholics, in turn, do not receive (in general) at the communion services of other churches.¹²

On one level this makes perfect sense: Eucharist is a sign of unity. No unity, no Eucharist. But if the Eucharist helps bring about what it signifies — moving those who partake towards unity, rather than a sign of perfect union already attained — then there are concerns and considerations which present a more compelling argument for why all Catholics and Christians — in fact all people — should be able to receive the Eucharist, if they feel called to partake.

From Unity Attained to Unity in Process

Let's consider what exactly is at stake in determining who can receive the sacrament of Eucharist. If it is true that the way we pray forms and shapes what we believe (*lex orandi, lex credendi*), then there are very practical concerns involved in what may seem an innocuous

¹¹Even among practicing Catholics today it is unclear how widespread belief in, or an accurate understanding of what the Roman Catholic teaching about real presence is. See Nathan D. Michell, "Who Is at the Table? Reclaiming Real Presence," *Commonweal*, January 27, 1995. A 1994 *New York Times*/CBS News poll "Found that almost two-thirds of American Catholics believe that during Mass...the bread and wine can best be understood as 'symbolic reminders of Christ' rather than as actually being changed into Christ's body and blood."

¹²Canon 844 of Canon Law provides only very narrow exceptions to the rule of intercommunion. Unless there is an urgent situation (such as danger of death), Catholics should only receive communion from other Catholics. The *Decree on Ecumenism*, however, reflects the Second Vatican Council's willingness to accept other situations of intercommunion when participation may be spiritually advantageous: when "gaining a needed grace sometimes commends" it. Kevin Considine, "Can a Catholic Receive Communion in a Protestant Church?," *U.S. Catholic* 76, 10 (October 2011). It should also be noted that a bishop from a given diocese can allow for exceptions to be made in either direction (Canon 844) — for Catholics to receive at a Protestant service or for a Protestant to receive communion at mass. These exceptions are rarely exercised, probably for the reason that few people think far enough ahead to petition for such an exception.

ritual action.¹³ The numerous firestorms over liturgy since the Second Vatican Council demonstrate the validity of this: even the smallest changes (e.g. when the congregation sits or stands, what words are used, whether lay people are allowed to touch the altar or not) impact greatly people's worship and lives. But what does the exclusion of certain people from the Eucharist say about what we as Catholics believe?

First, prescribed exclusions implicitly indicate that there are certain people and certain types of sinners who are not invited to eat at the Lord's Table, because they are not worthy. Yet scripturally, those Jesus ate with were among the lowest and most sinful people in the society. For example, the Gospel of Luke, which is considered to be the gospel that focuses most on the theme of hospitality, recounts over eight different occasions of Jesus breaking bread with people before his entry into Jerusalem.¹⁴ Those who join him at table vary greatly: tax collectors (5:27-32), sinners (7:34-35), Pharisees and scholars of the law (5:36, 11:37, 14:1), Jairus' daughter (8:55), a great multitude of people (9:13-17), those gathered at Martha and Mary's house (10:38-42), and Zacchaeus (19:5). Furthermore, many of Jesus' parables involve eating, the criteria used for table fellowship, and, frequently, the reversal of widespread expectations: who should sit where and why; who was welcome to partake and who was excluded. In the parable of the Great Feast (14:15-24), in which heaven itself is compared to a banquet, all people are invited, but those who actually come to the banquet are the poor, the crippled, and the strangers who are on the streets and byways. Also, the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (16:19-31) demonstrates that excluding those whom humans may consider to be unworthy from one's table contributes to judgment against one's self. Being in a state of sinfulness, too, is not enough to prevent one's eating with Jesus. In fact, Jesus' desire to eat with sinners is often the impetus for repentance and actual change — not the result of it — as in the case of Zacchaeus or the disciples gathered in Tiberias after the resurrection (Lk 24:36-43).¹⁵ Even Judas Iscariot was invited to break bread with Jesus. Sharing meals, in these cases, was not only about ratifying belief but inviting those who partake into greater faith and unity. If it

¹³*Catechism*, 1124. "according to Prosper of Aquitaine [5th cent.]...The law of prayer is the law of faith: the Church believes as she prays. Liturgy is a constitutive element of the holy and living Tradition."

¹⁴Martin William Mittelstadt, "Eat, Drink, and Be Merry: A Theology of Hospitality in Luke-Acts," *Word & World* 34, 2 (Spring 2014) 131-139.

¹⁵Rouillard, "Human Meal," 143-144.

is true that no one is “worthy” (“Lord I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed...”),¹⁶ then how can one be excluded from participation in the Eucharist because of sin, even the gravest of offenses? Those in mortal sin, above all, should be allowed or even encouraged to receive the Eucharist because, through the encounter, — like those who ate with Jesus — they may have the strength and courage to repent and change their lives.

Second, limiting those who may receive communion demonstrates that the understanding of Eucharist as a meal, in which people are nourished and sustained for the journey ahead, and become closer to those with whom they break bread, is not the dominant model for understanding the sacrament today; rather, the Eucharist as sacrifice is still preeminent. If one were to understand the Eucharist as true “food for the journey,” which, instead of being defiled or conformed to the one who receives it, changes the recipient, then those who are furthest from Christ or know him the least should come forward to be healed and transformed.¹⁷ Sacraments effect what they signify, so if the Eucharist — “Communion” — is meant to symbolize the unity of believers and the church, then it cannot be just a reflection of a state

¹⁶This, of course, is the 1969 English translation for celebrating the mass. It has been replaced as of November 27, 2011 with the much less felicitous and less scripturally evocative translation: “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.” The central problem here is the verbal separation between body and soul that is affected here. The body is not merely a building or “roof” in which the soul (read “the substantive, important part of a person”) resides. A person is an integrated whole — body and soul — the neglect of which is at the heart of some of the justice issues mentioned subsequently. Sexuality, nutrition, healthcare, and all physical needs are not ancillary to the living out of the gospel, but are at its very heart. To relegate in liturgy the physical to a lesser spot, albeit a small change, reflects, a lack of emphasis on people’s tangible well-being here and now. For more discussion on this topic, see: George B. Wilson, “Forum: But How Will the Introduction of the New Roman Missal Be Evaluated?,” *Worship* 86, 6 (Nov 6, 2012). Also, Gail Ramshaw, “Yesterday’s Language: The New Words of the Catholic Mass,” *The Christian Century*, Sep 6, 2011. And Rita Ferrone, “It Doesn’t Sing: The Trouble with the New Roman Missal,” *Commonweal*, June 30, 2011. <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/it-doesn%E2%80%99t-sing>

¹⁷Kevin Knight, ed., St Thomas Aquinas, “Summa Theologica,” in *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Kevin Knight (1265-1274). III q.72, article 2 in particular, Reply to Objection 1: “As Christ’s Passion, in virtue whereof this sacrament is accomplished, is indeed the sufficient cause of glory, yet not so that we are thereby forthwith admitted to glory, but we must first “suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified” afterwards “with Him” (Romans 8:17), so this sacrament does not at once admit us to glory, *but bestows on us the power of coming unto glory. And therefore it is called “Viaticum,”* a figure whereof we read in 1 Kings 19:8: “Elias ate and drank, and walked in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights unto the mount of God, Horeb,” (emphasis mine).

of affairs that already exists, rather, there is some real action and consequence that results from it. The Eucharist not only symbolizes but also *effects* unity among those who share in it, so the best way to proclaim the gospel and demonstrate the truth of the faith is to start with sharing something that can actually bring about the desired end.¹⁸ The real presence of Christ, working in the Spirit, is the one who ultimately speaks to the hearts and minds of people. That is where conversion must begin, instead of the Eucharist being reserved for the final culmination of the process alone.

Third, there is a social justice concern insofar as those who are excluded from the table are often those who need the most from the community of believers, but are neglected. For example, not only are divorced and remarried Catholics not allowed to receive communion officially, they are also neglected, as far as ministry. Homosexual men and women likewise are marginalized in the church, and only within small enclaves are they welcomed and ministered to. Who today are treated like the lepers of society if not these people? The sacrament — or lack thereof — effects what it signifies here, too. One might draw a correlation between those who are denied communion and those who are invisible in our communities of faith.¹⁹ Without the justice component of the Eucharist, the People of God are denied of the full eschatological blessing of the sacrament: to bring all creation into the fullness of God's presence — starting here and now, and reaching its fullness at the Eschaton.

Reverence and Disposition

A valid concern, however, is that if the Eucharist is open to all people, then it will cease to have meaning. Somehow its sacredness and uniqueness will be diminished, and people will slowly start to lose respect for the sacrament or cease to see the need for proper education regarding what the Eucharist means for Catholics. Receiving communion might become just a convenient habit, something upon which one does not reflect. This would be a greater detriment to people's souls and relationships with God than refusing

¹⁸We are transformed into that which we receive. Kevin Knight, ed., St. Augustine, "Sermon 7 to Competentes on Matthew 6 (the Lord's Prayer)," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, ed. Kevin Knight (400). "So then the Eucharist is our daily bread; but let us in such wise receive it, that we be...gathered together into His body, and made His members, we may be what we receive."

¹⁹For more discussion of this, especially a feminist critique of how equality before God in the Eucharist is a challenge for current Eucharist practice, see Joan Chittister, "Eucharist," *Spirituality*, March-April 2012.

participation in the Eucharist to begin with, as Paul indicates in the first letter to the Corinthians (11:27-29): “Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord. A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself.” The magisterium of the church shares this concern and has cited it as one of the reasons for insisting that only those prepared come forward to receive.

A question that arises then is “Does Jesus need protecting?” Is there any reason to think that a poor or careless disposition on the part of one who receives the Eucharist diminishes Jesus or the effects of the sacrament? Thomas Aquinas affirmed that even a priest who, during the consecration, has doubts about the real presence does not invalidate the sacrament.²⁰ It is still efficacious. By this logic, the disposition of the one receiving should not be the definitive determiner of reception.

But even putting this point aside, officially restricting who has access to the Eucharist does not fully solve this issue of maintaining the sacredness of the act of receiving the body and blood of Christ. First, this concern for proper disposition in receiving is as compelling for people who are Catholic and not in mortal sin as it would be for anyone “in sin” or outside the Roman Catholic tradition who would receive. In fact, awareness of sin, or not being officially part of the Catholic Church, might even make one more aware of what one is doing, or not doing, when one makes the choice to come forward.

For example, this was demonstrated to me when a friend of mine, who lived in my dorm at a Catholic college, died tragically. She was Episcopalian, yet she never missed Wednesday night hall mass. At her memorial service, during the homily at her home church, I learned for the first time that she had expressed to her mother and pastor on various occasions that one of the things that saddened her most was that she was unable to receive communion “legally” at the dorm mass. She felt part of the community in every way, and yet she could not take part in the sacrament of communion. So many times I, and many of the other residents, had received Eucharist without much of a thought, while it was clear that she had thought about it carefully many times without being able to participate. In honour of her, her pastor invited all of us to come forward when it was time for the Eucharistic

²⁰Aquinas, ST, IIIa, Q. 64, a. 9.

celebration at their service. It was a powerful message which makes it impossible for me to believe that non-Catholics would necessarily take Eucharistic reception for granted or foster that attitude among others.

In addition to the practical intuition, the cited passage from Corinthians is situated between two texts that talk about the exclusion of the poor from the tables of the wealthy. Paul recounts the institution of the Lord's Supper, it would seem, to remind "those who are approved among you" (11:19) not to leave the more marginalized out of their banquets. In this light, the greater sin against the Lord's Supper might be the reception of the body and blood without receiving one's neighbour who is in need — creating a false unity among the likeminded rather than striving for real unity without erasing distinctions and differences.²¹ If we only invite those we agree with to the table, then we merely reinforce the *status quo*, refusing to disrupt a narrative and praxis that oppresses some people.²² As long as someone's human dignity languishes, such complacency is incompatible with the striving for full coming of the Reign of God.

Sensus Fidelium and Healing Divisions

Interestingly, although the official teaching of the Church asks non-Catholics or those in mortal sin not to receive the Eucharist, the majority of people, in practice, accept the reception of the sacrament by anyone who wishes to come forward. This is especially evident at events like baptisms, weddings, and funerals that remind those present of that which transcends all artificial boundaries. Although I have been present at funerals and weddings where the presider has made explicit who can receive the Eucharist versus those who may

²¹Chittister, "Eucharist." She reflects that "The major problem of eucharistic theology in our century is not that people do not understand and value the meaning of Eucharist. The problem is that they do. The Eucharist, every child learns young, is the sign of Christian community, the very heart of it, in fact. And who would deny the bond, the depth, the electrical force that welds us together in it? Here, we know, is the linkage between us and the Christ, between us and the Gospel, between us and the Tradition that links us to Jesus himself and to the world around us. No, what the Eucharist is meant to be is not what's in doubt. What's in doubt is that the Eucharist is really being allowed to do what it purports to do — to connect us, to unify us, to make us One. The truth is that as much as Eucharist is a sign of community it is also a sign of division."

²²R. Kevin Seasoltz, "Justice and the Eucharist," in *Living Bread, Saving Cup*, ed. R. Kevin Seasoltz, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1987, 311. Here he observes: "To follow Christ and to live through the power of his Spirit means that one must share his life not only with other committed disciples but with all those who are excluded from communion. The scandal of the rich in the gospel is not that they are rich and others poor... The scandal is that wealth gives the rich a false sense of security which walls them off from the demands of others..."

come forward for a blessing, the injunction has, without exception, marred the movement of the Spirit at the event. Death and new life, which are themes in all of these major ceremonies, awaken anew an awareness of the universal human need to love and be loved, to be remembered, to pursue justice actively, and to hope for something better. Having come together, and being bound by the same ultimate questions, receiving communion is the expression of this unity, but it is marred by the official magisterium's proscription of who is allowed to receive communion or not. Participating in Eucharist, not just on these special occasions, is always fundamentally about being caught up in mystery. It lies beyond our power to effect, and so remains pure gift. God bestows this gift of real presence without reserve or limit; therefore, it is inappropriate for us to ration it.

The growing consensus among the Catholics in the pews, that non-Catholics and anyone who feels compelled to receive the Eucharist should be allowed to do so, is very significant. It is not just the raw number of people *per se* that matter — as if who should be allowed to receive is something that should be decided by a vote — but the fact that these people are the Church, through whom God, in the Spirit, works. There are, in fact, two ways that the Catholic Church discerns and promulgates what the Church ought to do in matters of faith and morals: it can begin with an elucidation of a topic by the bishops, in union with the Pope, or it can begin among the faithful. One of these routes for discernment is much more familiar to Catholics today than the other, due in large part to the overemphasis placed on papal authority during the second millennium. This, as Hermann Pottmeyer describes, was a response to the formation of nation-states with strong political heads, which culminated for Roman Catholics as the doctrine of papal infallibility outlined in the unfinished documents of Vatican I.²³ Yet the authority of the *sensus fidelium* need not, and should not, be conceived of in opposition to this episcopal authority. The two work together. Regardless of whether a change or addendum on an issue of faith and morals originates at the grassroots level or as the result of a collegial, magisterial initiative, full reception of a teaching or practice as an authentic expression of the love and will of God requires the approval of both. While we may be more accustomed to the top-down model, it is necessary to recover once more the process by which the bishops and magisterium listen to

²³Hermann J. Pottmeyer, *Towards a Papacy in Communion: Perspectives from Vatican Councils I & II*, New York, NY: Herder & Herder, 1998. The interruption was due to the outbreak of war in Europe, leaving many of the documents and declarations unfinished as far as the full deliberation and ratification by the council fathers.

what the people are saying, in word and action, as a valid and compelling means by which the Spirit guides the church. The fact that so many Catholics believe that the current official guidelines for the reception of the Body and Blood of Christ are too restrictive is compelling, and must not be dismissed as the rebellious dissention of people who do not understand the full import of the issue.

The Catholic Church today is grappling with how to further its efforts towards ecumenism and interreligious dialogue, evangelization, and the renewal and reintegration of Catholics who have been alienated and scarred by the Church. It faces a world that is increasingly pluralistic, sometimes ambiguous, and often threatening. One response to these challenges is to turn in on itself, to become more sectarian, more protective, and more focused on criteria of who should be “in” and “out” of the Church.²⁴ Another response is to become a force for healing in a wounded and broken world. If we, as Catholics, really believe that we have been given the ultimate gift, the very Body and Blood of Jesus, then one way to be bearers of such healing is by offering that which we have to all who need it. We must be willing to risk the possibility that the Eucharist can and will effect what it signifies: no less than the union of all the living and the dead, the reunion of humanity with all of creation, and the forgiveness of sin. It is more than likely that, were all people invited to receive communion at all masses around the world, some people would come forward who are unworthy, mired in sin, feeling far from God. Some would receive who do not believe at all. But this is to be expected, even welcomed, for Jesus came specifically to call these people to the banquet because Jesus came to “seek and to save what was lost” (Lk 19:10). This reflects a shift towards acknowledging the process of moving towards an ideal — the “law of graduality”²⁵ — by extending our greatest and inexhaustible gift to those who need it most.

²⁴This seems to be the attitude behind the vision of the church as a “little flock,” as enunciated in 1969 by then professor of theology, Joseph Ratzinger. “The church will become small and will have to start afresh more or less from the beginning... But when the trial of this sifting is past, a great power will flow from a more spiritualized and simplified Church. Men in a totally planned world will find themselves unspeakably lonely. If they have completely lost sight of God, they will feel the whole horror of their poverty. Then they will discover the little flock of believers as something wholly new. They will discover it as a hope that is meant for them, an answer for which they have always been searching in secret.” Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *Faith and the Future*, 3rd ed., San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1971, 2006, 2009.

²⁵L’Osservatore Romano. http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2014/10/13/synod_on_family_midterm_report_presented,_2015