

Baptism, Eucharist, and the Hospitality of Jesus: On the Practice of “Open Communion”

JAMES FARWELL*

The opening of the eucharistic table to the unbaptized is a practice inspired by the radical hospitality of Jesus. Too often, however, the practice of open communion is adopted casually, without the systematic theological reflection called for by something so central to ecclesial identity and mission. Among the issues the practice raises are (1) its reliance on the claim that Jesus would not have shared a ritual meal with his disciples alone, (2) its departure from the paschal ecclesiology at the heart of contemporary liturgical renewal, which links baptism and eucharist to a post-Constantinian understanding of mission, (3) its failure both to appreciate the pastoral value of longing, and to avoid a modernist commitment to the immediate gratification of individual desire, (4) its naive assumption that boundaries are necessarily inhospitable, and (5) its taking the place of genuine evangelism and public ecclesial witness. This essay, while not an exhaustive argument against open communion, addresses these critical issues.

It has become commonplace, in some circles of the Episcopal Church, to argue that communion ought to be offered to the unbaptized in public worship as an expression of the radical hospitality of Jesus. A handful of high profile parishes, in conscientious defiance of the canons of the Episcopal Church that restrict communion to the baptized,¹ have undertaken the practice and inspired a number of other parishes to do the same. While the actual practice of offering communion to the unbaptized does not appear to be widespread, its profile is high enough to have warranted a resolution before the 74th General Convention asking for the appointment of a task force to consider the serious ecumenical and theological ramifications of this

* James Farwell is assistant professor in the H. Boone Porter Chair of Liturgics, The General Theological Seminary.

¹ See *Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church* (New York: Church Publishing, 2000), Title I, Canon 17, Sect. 7.

growing practice.² The topic was recently on the agenda of Anglican liturgists who meet annually with the North American Academy of Liturgy. The Episcopal Church is not alone in reconsidering the traditional restriction of communion to the baptized. Recently, scholars and pastors of the Presbyterian Church (USA) devoted a vigorous session at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion to this topic, and Methodists have long discussed whether Wesley meant by his claim that the Lord's Supper is a "converting ordinance" that the table should be open to all.

On any given Sunday, should "seekers," those "passing through," unbaptized guests or family members of parishioners, the spiritually curious, or even people of other religions be invited and encouraged to receive the consecrated bread and wine of the eucharist?

Among those parishes that answer this question affirmatively by practicing "open communion,"³ the quality of theological reflection that accompanies the practice has been uneven, at best. Some parishes have adopted open communion after considerable discussion and analysis of related issues in sacramental theology, ecclesiology, and evangelism, while others have offered little justification beyond a general deference to the notion of the hospitality of Jesus. Of course, the hospitality of Jesus is of great significance: by those who articulate it carefully, the call for open communion aspires to embody the hospitality of Jesus Christ in our sacramental practices—practices themselves grounded in Christ as the primordial sacrament of God.⁴ Any argument that challenges us to be more open and hospitable toward the other deserves attention, both because of the human propensity to fortify our own egos and privileges by excluding others and because, by any reading of the gospels, Jesus' vision of the kingdom was one which renders problematic any hard boundaries between insiders and outsiders. However, before we rush toward the practice of open communion for all as more reflective of the ministry of Jesus, there are some

² The Resolution was A089 under the Report of the Standing Commission on Ecumenical Relations. It did not pass, but the concerns it represents will no doubt resurface at the next General Convention.

³ The term "open communion" once referred mainly to the allowance for eucharistic participation in one church by members of another. The current use of the term still has ecumenical ramifications, as the resolution under consideration by General Convention gives evidence.

⁴ For the classic systematic account of this notion that reframed Thomistic sacramental theology at Vatican II, see Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963).

questions that need further exploration. We have not settled the matter simply because, on the face of it, open communion *appears* more hospitable than the tradition of inviting the baptized to communion. A more systematic treatment of the practice is warranted.

In what follows, I suggest some issues that deserve further consideration by those who argue for open communion. Neither my treatment of the issues, nor the list of issues I choose to explore, is exhaustive. They do not constitute a fully systematic defense of the restriction of communion to the baptized. They do, however, reflect the opinion that the current movement toward open communion is ill conceived and that such a shift in practice signals a sea change in sacramental theology, ecclesiology, missiology, and pastoral theory that deserves more thoughtful attention than it has thus far received. Mine is an unenviable, even scandalous position to take in today's theological context in which liberation, feminist, and postmodernist influences on theology place hospitality to the excluded *other* at the top of the ecclesial agenda.⁵ In such a climate, I risk being accused of being *non-inclusive* or of failing to think imaginatively about the church's outreach to a post-Christian culture. Counterintuitively, I believe that the practice of open communion is *inhospitable*, and represents confusion about the very nature of the gift that the church has to offer the culture in which it is situated. The substantive contours of this claim will emerge in due course through an exploration of biblical, historical, theological, pastoral, and cultural issues. Here, it will suffice to note that a general bias toward hospitality does not settle all questions and must not be allowed to prevent our *thinking* about the true nature of hospitality in relation to the life into which we are drawn through our sacramental practice.

Before turning to the issues surrounding this practice, I wish to be clear about two things. First, by questioning the wisdom of open communion, I am not proposing a rigid exclusivism at the pastoral level. We do not "check ecclesiastical ID cards" at the altar rail, and no pastor in her right mind will deny communion to someone who has, in fact, arrived at the altar rail expecting to receive. It is another matter to extend an unconditional invitation to communion as an official policy, publishing that policy through service bulletins, an-

⁵ For a relatively recent example, see Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1996).

nouncements, websites, and the like. The status of the latter is the question we are addressing here.

Second, it should be stated clearly that the practice of open communion is a violation of the discipline of the Episcopal Church (Title I, Canon 17, Section 7) to which clergy (who in most cases preside over the liturgies of local congregations) have vowed to be faithful. Clergy responsible for liturgical decisions who establish a practice of open communion might candidly ask themselves whether their practice represents acquiescence to the “seduction of relevancy”⁶ (difficult but important to avoid in parish ministry) or collusion with a disturbing trend toward *de facto* congregationalism in Episcopal parishes. In the face of both these temptations, one must remember that while the canons are not infallible and are constantly being revised, there is a forum for revision and it is not the local parish. With that acknowledgement made, we cannot categorically condemn conscientious defiance of the canons: precisely because they encode the broad outlines of our theology in some matters, we sometimes bend the canons under the pressure of new and worthy theological considerations as our understanding of the gospel develops and the context for ministry places new demands upon us. One hopes that the current practice of open communion in Episcopal parishes represents such a conscientious decision, and not merely a fascination with the novel.

The Argument for Open Communion

The contemporary argument for offering communion to the unbaptized, if coherently stated, runs something like this: (1) The church is the sacrament of Jesus Christ, the primordial sacrament of God. The church’s ethics, therefore, should be modeled on, and judged by, the ethics of Jesus Christ. (2) Jesus lived and preached in faithful expectation of the coming of the *basileia tou theou*, the kingdom of God, in which the boundary lines between the outsider and the insider, the “sinner” and the “saint,” drop away under God’s gracious rule. Jesus *performed* his vision of the reign of God through a radical ethic of hospitality, eating with sinners and outcasts. He reserved his strictest judgment for those religious leaders who drew sharp legal distinctions be-

⁶ Linda Moeller, “Baptism: Rite of Inclusion or Exclusion?” in *Leaps and Boundaries: The Prayer Book in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Paul V. Marshall and Lesley Northrup (Harrisburg, Pa.: Morehouse, 1997), 82.

tween those inside and outside the circle of holiness. (3) If the meal ministry of Jesus incarnated his vision of the kingdom of God, then ours ought to do the same. Making baptism the “door” to the table is an exclusionary rule, suggesting that one must enter the circle of holiness before one can commune with the faithful. In short: if Jesus was hospitable to all, then we should be hospitable to all. If God is open to all, then our table should be open to all.

That is the argument, implicit or explicit, that is offered for opening the eucharistic table to the unbaptized. Where the work of biblical and historical scholars is cited in support of this argument, it is with a claim that the restriction of the eucharist to the baptized was not an early practice and is, therefore, insupportable. Granting for the sake of argument the assumption that only what is early is supportable, logical, or authentic to the spirit of Jesus,⁷ scholars of the Jesus Seminar suggest that the synoptic accounts of the eucharistic meal and the account in 1 Corinthians are retrojections of later ecclesiastical practice into the earlier period. They like to point out that most of the meal ministry of Jesus is characterized by an open table and rule out, *prima facie*, the likelihood of a meal in which Jesus gathered only with disciples and certainly any meal in which he uttered the peculiar words “This is my Body,” “This is my Blood.” Thus the only meal ministry of Jesus relevant to the church’s meal ministry is that of his wider, public, and open meals described in the gospels.⁸

⁷ This is no small assumption, but a full exposition of the problems associated with it exceeds the scope of this article. Very briefly put: the importance of the early biblical (and liturgical) material must be understood in relation to the nature of Christian liturgical practice, which is not mainly *mimetic*, but *anamnetic*. Christian liturgy is not the calming of anxiety in the present by imitation of the past, but the transfiguration of the present and future by remembrance of the past. In *anamnetic* worship, the relationship between the founding person and event, on the one hand, and the ritual rehearsal of the community’s faith in that person or event, on the other, is more complex than the simple duplication of prior practices, so much so that fidelity to the founder might well involve practices and formulations *different* from that of the founder. The failure to understand this is one of the most troubling assumptions of the work of the Jesus Seminar and some other biblical scholars and historians. For a non-liturgical approach to what liturgists mean by *anamnesis*, see Paul Connerton on the distinction between memory as “commemorative” and as “performative” in *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 41-71. Compare to this the somewhat different but intriguing concept of “non-identical repetition” as used by Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 109, 160.

⁸ For example, John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994), 130.

Even if the Jesus Seminar's fairly radical rejection of a ritual meal shared by Jesus and his disciples is overstated, one must concede that the earliest documentary evidence of the eucharist—Paul's first letter to the Corinthians—makes no *explicit* reference to restricting communion to the baptized.

The same lack of early support for the restriction of communion to the baptized is claimed with reference to the post-apostolic period. Hippolytus's *Apostolic Tradition* gives us one of the earliest pictures of initiatory practice that is available, but the work is typically dated around 215 C.E. and some have suggested that the initiatory materials are more complex in their provenance and later in dating than previously thought.⁹ Certainly John Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Ambrose, and others for whom eucharist is integrally connected to baptism as the completion of the process of initiation, write in the later fourth and early fifth century. With regard to early documentation, then, we are left only with fragmentary evidence for restricting communion to the baptized, that is, the Syrian church order called the *Didache* and the *First Apology* of Justin Martyr, dated somewhere between 90 C.E. and 150 C.E.

These and similar observations are offered by scholars to suggest that the restriction of the eucharistic meal to the baptized is a relatively late development that is inconsistent with the meal ministry of Jesus, that is, inconsistent with his vision of the kingdom.

The Historical and Biblical Foundations of a Meal for the Initiated

Let us begin our consideration of the historical connection between baptism and eucharist by accepting the legitimacy of the classic project of historical-critical scholars of the Bible, which attempts to disentangle authentic Jesus material from other material in the canonical gospels. Bracketing (again) the legitimacy of the assumption that "earlier is better," that project is not entirely without Christological warrant, as the intentions and actions of Jesus surely have a normative status for all Christians, even if the proper translation of his intentions to contexts other than that of first-century Palestine is not always transparent. Granting this privilege of Jesus' own actions over the practices developed by his disciples, we must declare that *it*

⁹ For an example of this position and an overview of some research, see Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 2d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 161-164.

is not clear that the origins of the eucharist cannot reside with Jesus. While some scholars suggest that Jesus would not have practiced a ritual meal with his disciples, not all agree. John Koenig reminds us that Jesus' Galilean ministry is marked by a prophetic consciousness to which symbolically enacted teaching would not have been unfamiliar. Given his practice of preaching and symbolizing his hope for an inbreaking kingdom of God through meal images and practices, it is not unreasonable to imagine that he might have gathered with his disciples in the last hour, under the shadow of the impending culmination of his conflict with temple leaders, for an intimate meal that focused, in symbolic words and actions, the vision of his hoped-for kingdom.¹⁰ He could well have imagined that this meal would continue to animate his disciples after he was separated from them. A ritual meal of the type recorded in Matthew 26 and Luke 22, and referred to in John 13 as the setting for the prophetic action of foot washing, would not have been a proto-ecclesiastical cultic practice out of character with his ministry, but precisely the focus of the vision of the kingdom that had animated his entire ministry, including his broader meal practices. It is simply not a foregone conclusion that Jesus could not have established or intended a special meal through which his disciples would ritually remember his vision of the kingdom that animated his wider ministry and continues to animate ours.

This argument for the possibility—even likelihood—of the eucharistic meal as a final gathering with Jesus' disciples is important because it challenges the notion that the whole meal ministry of Jesus is unnecessarily narrowed by eucharistic practice restricted to those who have become disciples (the baptized). To the contrary, the scholarly consensus summarized by Koenig suggests that Jesus' open meal ministry and the more focused supper with the disciples lie alongside one another in a non-dualistic relationship. Not only does the eucharistic meal *not* limit the wider meal ministry of the church—fellowship meals, public meals, banquets for the homeless and poor—but the eucharist provides the foundation for those wider meals and the reason for their practice among those who have adopted Jesus' kingdom vision. So, if the last supper with Jesus encoded with the disciples the whole thrust of his mission, setting his own impending sacrifice in the context of a life poured out for the kingdom to which they eventually

¹⁰ See John Koenig, *The Feast of the World's Redemption: Eucharistic Origins and Christian Mission* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2000), 14-17.

understood themselves to be committed, then it is reasonable for us today to think about who participates in that meal and whether they have committed themselves to the vision that animated Jesus. Such a practice is not inhospitable, but simply focused for a certain “audience”: the eucharistic meal is the place where the disciples continue to gather in intimate communion with Jesus Christ and from which they are empowered to move out into wider ministries of evangelism and service, including a ministry of eating and drinking in contexts beyond the bounds of this ritual practice.

If it is possible to read the gospels as attesting to a ritualized meal in which the work of Jesus was brought to intimate expression with his disciples on the eve of the “end” of his earthly ministry, what is one to make of the eucharistic reference in 1 Corinthians? Presented as a practice Paul learned in Jerusalem only a few years after Jesus’ death, it is the most detailed reference to the eucharist outside the gospels and does not appear to make any explicit restriction of the eucharist to the baptized.¹¹ Yet, upon scrutiny, there is apparent in the Corinthian passage a clear logic of participation. In 1 Corinthians 11:27 and following, Paul’s criticism of the Corinthians for their failure to discern the unity of the body of Christ as they come together to consume the body of Christ assumes that this meal has a specific character they are to understand and respect. The problem for which Paul challenges them is that they allow social boundaries between those who have much and those who have little to creep into the practice of the eucharistic community. Thus, for Paul, the eucharistic meal seems to focus the hospitality of Jesus toward the little ones and the outsiders to whom would be given the kingdom. Yet, understanding and practicing this meaning of the meal amounts to a condition for participation, so much so that those who have failed this condition are weak and ill and have even died! The paradoxical dynamic here is delightful: those who participate in this meal ritualize their expectation of the kingdom Jesus embodied and worked for, a rule of gracious and unconditional welcome to all; one should not participate in the meal, then, if one does not embody a commitment to that welcome that marks that coming rule of God! If there is no explicit restriction of communion to the baptized here, there is certainly a com-

¹¹ Of course, there is nothing to suggest that such a restriction did not exist, as the fundamental assumptions of Scripture are often not made explicit *in* Scripture. But arguments from absence are risky business.

plex logic of participation that suggests a certain way in which the meal is best approached.

In 1 Corinthians 10:14-22, Paul speaks of the eucharistic meal as a sharing in the very body and blood of Christ, and speaks of participation in either the eucharist or the cultic meals of the idols as an act of being partners either with Christ or with demons. “You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons,” he says. Again, there is a logic of participation in these passages that suggests anything but an indiscriminate or untutored participation in the eucharistic meal. It is, for Paul, a ritual that has the same focus on the future that animated Jesus himself—in which, for Paul, “we proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes,” and to which we are committed as he was.¹² Again, if the baptismal restriction is not explicitly mentioned, there is a logic of participation consistent with it, involving an adoption of the commitment to the reign of God and the hope for redemption as Jesus preached and embodied it. Ritually celebrating that reign and being nourished to participate in it is that for which the eucharistic meal is intended.

If the New Testament accounts present a eucharistic meal as a ritual coding of the commitment to the hospitable kingdom vision of Jesus that was celebrated in the meals involving a wider public, then the later documentary evidence of the eucharist must be revisited. On this reading, the documentary evidence of the post-apostolic period is not the accretion of ecclesiastical exclusivity, but the deepening of the participatory logic of the New Testament: eucharist completes the initiation and fires the remembrance of the disciple in a pattern of life suitable to the kingdom, to which he or she has joined himself or herself in baptism. Once dated around the year 90, and now thought to be a product of the early second century, the *Didache*’s injunction “You must not let anyone eat or drink of your eucharist except those baptized in the Lord’s Name” gives the bare outline of the logic of participation.¹³ But Justin Martyr has a clear sense that the eucharist is the meal of those who have adopted Jesus’ pattern of life: writing around 155, he says, “This food we call Eucharist, of which no one is allowed to partake except one who believes that the things we teach are true, and has received the washing for forgiveness of sins and for rebirth,

¹² This “Pauline comment” actually makes its way into the text of several eucharistic prayers, notably those of the West Syrian pattern.

¹³ *Didache* 9.5.

and who lives as Christ has handed down to us.”¹⁴ Later, Cyril of Jerusalem identifies the eucharist as the completion of initiation into discipleship in which we become “Christbearers.”¹⁵ Theodore of Mopsuestia speaks of the eucharist as the food “in keeping with your birth [in baptism],”¹⁶ and similar presentations of the eucharist as the completion of the movement into discipleship and grace can be seen in John Chrysostom and Ambrose. Augustine famously speaks of the body of Christ as the *signum* not only of Christ but of the body of believers who celebrate this meal: “So if it’s you that are the Body of Christ and its members, it’s the mystery meaning you that have been placed on the Lord’s table. . . . It is to what you are that you reply *Amen*, and by so replying you express your assent. . . . Be what you can see, and receive what you are.”¹⁷

In all these cases, the logic of participation of the New Testament material holds in which the eucharistic meal is a ritual that both nourishes and signifies an entrance into the paschal mystery in which, by the pattern of their lives, disciples enter into the embodiment of Jesus’ continuing ministry in the world. To the extent that it is the baptized who enter into that mystery, it is for the baptized that the meal is intended. It is not exclusionary to restrict that meal to those who commit themselves to anticipatory practice of the kingdom: to the contrary, one can argue that it is disingenuous to offer this meal as if it requires nothing but the desire to participate out of curiosity, custom, or an unformed sense of spiritual longing, however sincere.

The Sacramental Nexus of Baptism and Eucharist

Another matter that demands greater consideration before opening communion to the unbaptized is the sacramental nexus that exists between baptism and eucharist. Simply put, baptism is the ritual commitment to the *basileia tou theou* and eucharist is the ritual remembrance in which the commitment to the *basileia tou theou* is nourished. What must be pondered, then, is whether a change can be made independently to eucharistic discipline while continuing baptismal and eucharistic “business as usual.”

¹⁴ Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, sect. 66. Emphasis added.

¹⁵ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogical Catechesis* 4.3.

¹⁶ Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Third Baptismal Homily*, sect. 29.

¹⁷ Augustine, Sermon 272, in *The Works of St. Augustine*, vol. III.7, trans. by Edmund Hill (New Rochelle, N.Y.: New City Press, 1993), 300-301.

At its best, liturgy encodes, enacts, and nurtures the deep instincts of Christian faith that arise from our experience of God, instincts to which theological language gives expression. This is partly what is meant by Prosper's phrase: *ut legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi*, the law of prayer grounds the law of belief. Baptism and eucharist in particular function together to encode the "both-and" of the Christian experience of salvation: the radical gift of grace and the radical call to discipleship, inextricably connected. That "both-and" soteriology can be stated nontechnically as follows:

- All that we are and all that we have are given by God, freely and without condition, simply to be received. This we celebrate in baptism in the great narrative prayer over the water, which recounts the working out of God's plan of salvation begun long before the candidate arrives at the font. This, too, we celebrate in eucharist, because God feeds us there with the medicine of immortality,¹⁸ just as the mortally wounded wait, with trust, on the physician's arts to heal.
- Although it is unconditional, God's gift to us is not without cost: because we have fallen from it, or fail to live it, this free gift of God must be appropriated in our lives. We commit ourselves to it in response and are transformed. This we celebrate in baptism, by the *metanoia* ritualized in our renunciations and affirmations, our promises, and our commitment to the church's faith. This, too, we celebrate in eating and drinking the strange bread and wine of the Lord—strange because, as Thomas Aquinas observes, it does not change into nutritional material for us, but we are transformed into it.¹⁹ We approach the table with the commitment to be so transformed by the meal, for which we call in the *epiclesis* of every eucharistic prayer.²⁰

¹⁸ The phrase is Ignatius of Antioch's in his *Letter to the Ephesians*, sect. 20.

¹⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: A Concise Translation*, ed. by Timothy McDermott (Westminster, Md.: Christian Classics, 1989), 569 (III.73.3).

²⁰ In his *Mystagogical Catechesis* 3.5, Cyril of Jerusalem says, "For before you were admitted to baptism and the grace of the Holy Spirit, you had not properly qualified for the name though you were on the way to becoming Christians." The translation is by Edward Yarnold in *Cyril of Jerusalem* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 177. Here, Cyril gathers together the both-and of grace and transformation that makes us who we are: preparing for baptism, we advance toward that which is finally a gift. The gift is salvation, yet it is an identity built over time by a series of actions and practices.

While both baptism and eucharist encode in their own way this “both-and” of divine gift and moral response, the structural relationship of the two sacraments is such that baptism carries the weight of clarifying the life for which eucharist strengthens us. Baptism and eucharist thus require each other as the ritual grammar of this paradoxical “both-and” of Christian faith. This structural relationship is visible in the traditional brevity of detail that marks the eucharistic prayer: the Great Thanksgiving and the communion, taken together, are the performative shorthand for this divine life that we both *receive and adopt* through baptism. Historically, there is very little in the eucharistic prayer that expresses the precise character of Jesus’ mission and life into which we are drawn. Eucharistic prayers utilize terse symbolic phrases and compressed imaginal layers of rhetoric that are understood by the faithful *because they are baptized*. Prayer D of Rite II in the American Prayer Book of 1979, adapted from the late third- or early fourth-century Egyptian Anaphora of St. Basil, comes closest among the prayers of that book to a description of the shape of Christ’s life within the eucharistic prayer: “To the poor he proclaimed the good news of salvation; to prisoners, freedom; to the sorrowful, joy.”²¹ The second prayer of the supplemental liturgies of *Enriching Our Worship* also provides some limited detail: “Living among us Jesus loved us. He broke bread with outcasts and sinners, healed the sick, and proclaimed good news to the poor.”²² These mild exceptions prove the rule. From the most elaborate language of the Alexandrian and West Syrian anaphoral tradition to the rites of contemporary churches, there is in the eucharist little specificity of the life into which we are called. The presumption is that the meal is the completion of the initiation rite in which the lineaments of the Christian moral life *have already been explicitly rehearsed and promised*. In baptism, disciples have learned that a life responsive to God’s gracious gift, a life fit for the kingdom, is to turn from anything that destroys God’s creation, to continue in teaching and in communion with one another, to seek and serve Christ in all persons without discrimination, to strive for justice and peace.²³ Subsequent to initiation, eucharist sustains in remembrance and thanksgiving both the grace that

²¹ The Book of Common Prayer 1979, 374.

²² *Enriching Our Worship* (New York: Church Publishing, 1998), 61.

²³ See The Book of Common Prayer 1979, 302, 304-305.

has been offered and the life to which the baptized are called. Baptism leads to the table, the table presumes the content of baptism.

Open communion threatens to short-circuit this enacted “both-and” soteriology of the sacraments by collapsing the entire practice in the direction of the divine gift. It is a gift that the sacraments celebrate, but the gift of God is not an abstraction: *it is the shape of a life* which we receive by living it (and, of course, by seeking forgiveness and renewal as we stumble repeatedly in its appropriation). Churches who welcome to communion those who receive it out of mere curiosity, or an unreflective longing for transcendence, or an attraction to the Christ-image as a primal symbol of generic “spirituality,” or politeness to friends at a wedding, undertake a practice that is incoherent with respect to the faith enacted within it. The (baptismal) call to transformation assumed by the eucharist and the desire for transformation strengthened by the eucharist *toward a particular form of life* drops away. This is a long way from Augustine’s classic exposition of the eucharist in which we flourish by uniting ourselves with Christ’s own life, the very sacrifice celebrated in the eucharist. In its place is the thin substitute of hope that at some point in the future an individual participant might be persuaded by some undefined means, because she felt “welcomed” to eucharistic participation, to adopt the form of life which was the primary referent of the meal all along. To offer eucharist without baptism sets aside the call to redemption and human flourishing as a *life lived*, and replaces it with a welcome that should at any rate have already been offered through the public efforts of outreach, evangelism, and acts of hospitality. I will return to the question of evangelism and mission, below.

There is a twofold point to these observations. First, far from arguing in circular fashion that we ought to have the baptismal condition of eucharistic participation because we do, I am suggesting that the primary theology of these sacraments—the simultaneous *proclamation of divine gift without reservation* and *call to response without reserve*—challenges those who casually drop the baptismal requirement as if the two sacraments do not possess a sequential relationship to one another. An acknowledgement of the mutually interpreting connection between baptism and eucharist suggests that, if we drop the baptismal requirement for communion, we may need to consider nothing less than a more thorough and novel revision of both rites. Second, before taking up the practice of open communion, we ought to consider more carefully the possible truth of this claim: *the bap-*

tismal restriction is not right because it is ancient, rather it is ancient because it is right. That is, these interconnected sacraments arguably reflect the very dynamic of our encounter with the mystery of God in Christ—an encounter human beings have always experienced as both utterly gracious and free, *and* demanding all that we have to give. To relax either side of this theological dynamic is to risk infidelity to the catholic tradition and to what the reformers sought to reclaim.

In this light, it is worth thinking more carefully about the hospitality offered through the proposed suspension of the baptismal requirement for eucharistic participation. What is it that the church has to offer to the unbaptized? What is the shape of the life which, given as sheer gift, demands at the same time our appropriation? In other words, toward what end is our hospitality aimed? The baptismal-eucharistic nexus suggests that what the church has to offer is (as the catechumens claim upon their admission to the catechumenate) “Life in Christ,”²⁴ both a gift given to us and a call laid upon us.

The Paschal Mystery, Mission, and Hospitality

I have suggested that there is a classic soteriology enacted in the structural connection of baptism and eucharist on which the practice of open communion may have a serious impact. The structural connection goes deeper in the master-symbol of the paschal mystery. Again, the question that concerns us is whether those who practice open communion have too casually disconnected the two sacraments without sufficient attention to the impact on the total theology enacted in their symbolic co-implication.

Among the significant theological developments of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer was the reemergence of the import of baptism and an accompanying sense of *differentiation* between life in Christ and life in “the world.” In no way rejecting the irenic view of the glories of the created order typical of Anglican incarnational theology, the present Prayer Book brings the need for the redemption of the created order into sharper relief. Baptism is recovered as a prominent corporate celebration intended for days especially freighted with the significance of Christ’s life or the effects of it. Furthermore, the structure of the liturgy implies that adult baptism is normative.

²⁴ *The Book of Occasional Services 1994* (New York: Church Publishing, 1995), 115.

Taken together, these developments suggest that Christian life involves a conscious commitment to values and life-practices that are distinguishable from non-Christian values and norms.²⁵ Our sacramental celebration both enacts and reflects our sense of that life. Along with the present Prayer Book's recovery of baptism came the development of the adult catechumenate, as we increasingly found ourselves receiving into the church adults who had never been baptized and formed in the Christian way of life. The resources for the catechumenate are now provided in the *Book of Occasional Services* and reflect the same non-Constantinian ecclesiology of differentiation as our present baptismal practice.

The recovery of the eucharist as the normative liturgy of the Lord's Day is another significant development of the 1979 prayer book. But in the 1979 book, these two developments are integrated, as both the recovery of baptism and the restoration of regular eucharist are "subsets" of a more fundamental shift: the return of "paschal mystery" as the master-symbol of Christian life and faith. The adaptation of the church's ancient and early medieval liturgical practices around the paschal *triduum*—Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and the Great Vigil of Easter—celebrate the death and resurrection of Christ as the fundamental key to the character of Christian identity. Dying to the old life and rising in Christ to a new life, Christians are set free for a pattern of existence that both completes and transforms the created order into which we are born. The powerful sense of incorporation into the paschal mystery crowns Holy Week in proper liturgies that are the native home of baptism and communion, at which time penitents were once restored to the fellowship of the church, catechumens were baptized, and the meal was celebrated as remembrance of, and sustenance for, life in the new reality. The paschal liturgies of Holy Week were, by the fourth century, considered by many to be as central to the Christian liturgical year as the Sunday eucharist was to the week.

Since the 1979 revision of the Prayer Book around paschal symbolism, a largely unanticipated and unintended tension has emerged between the restored significance of baptism and the recovery of the catechumenate, on one hand, and the recovery of eucharist as the normative celebration of the Lord's Day, on the other. It appears that

²⁵ Precisely what values are Christian or not is determined through the church's ongoing moral discussion and debate.

the liturgies of Holy Week have been accepted most slowly of the changes in the 1979 book. They are elaborate and dramatic and it takes time to weave the life of local congregations fully into their rhythm. The elimination of private baptisms and the restoration of baptismal days have been accepted more quickly, though not yet universally, and churches are continuing to reckon with the responsibility and joy of preparing adult candidates for baptism. But the normative celebration of the eucharist on Sunday has been accepted the most quickly of all the changes of the Prayer Book. The different pace with which each of these developments has made its way into the life of the church may have allowed for the unraveling of what is, in fact, the sacramental-ecclesiological pattern of a whole: the church as the very body of Christ in which is incarnated the mystery of the Pasch, called out of the world as the kingdom under construction. What has emerged instead may be less a paschal ecclesiology and perhaps not even a baptismal ecclesiology, except with respect to the welcome rise of lay ministry. What has developed is a eucharistic ecclesiology in which the life and identity of the church is centered, not around the full symbolism of Easter, but around the Sunday gathering whose sense of being a “little Easter” is eclipsed.²⁶

This development may have created the climate in which it is possible to disconnect the eucharist from baptism and to raise questions about discipline as if the meaning of the former is rather independent of the latter. Within the paschal matrix, the multiple meanings of the eucharist are held in creative and felicitous tension: the table is a place of radical hospitality and celebration *but also* a share in Christ’s cup of suffering—remembrance of the unconditional grace of the One who feeds us *but also* a foretaste of a kingdom not of this world—a feeding on the body of Christ given graciously to us in our need *but also* the ritual enactment that we ourselves are the very body poured out for the needs of the world.²⁷ It is the hermeneutical situation of the eucharist (and baptism) within the master-symbol of the Pasch that keeps this creative and dynamic tension in motion. While one or another eucharistic meaning may come to the fore, the eucharist is never reduced simply to one of these meanings.

²⁶ For an excellent treatment of baptismal and eucharistic ecclesiologies in relation to the liturgical movement in the Episcopal Church, see Ruth A. Meyers, *Continuing the Reformation: Re-Visioning Baptism in the Episcopal Church* (New York: Church Publishing, 1997), esp. chap. 2.

²⁷ Augustine, Sermon 272, 300-301.

Cut loose from the paschal symbol, however, and with the full impact of the baptismal renewal yet to emerge in our churches, the meal begins to occupy reflection in and of itself. Reflection on its meaning can more easily occur without reference to the demands of the baptismal life or the existential revolution to which the paschal mystery points. When one places this excitement of reflection on the eucharist in a socio-cultural setting where the entire gospel is sometimes reduced to the idea of “inclusivity”²⁸ and where Christians are (appropriately) concerned with the accusation that Christian life is nothing more than a transcendently justified moralism or modernism,²⁹ then one understands the pressure to *completely identify the reign of God with hospitality, without remainder*. The welcome of non-members to the meal is pursued without reference to the changed pattern of life that is its horizon. Yet it remains an open question whether this is a reliable definition of the *basileia tou theou* or the function of eucharist within the sacramental structure of the Book of Common Prayer. Within that structure, a spirit of hospitality emerges as one feature, but not the only feature, of a Christian life in which we welcome newcomers *to something*.

The symbolism of the paschal mystery that shapes the 1979 Prayer Book corresponds to a non-Constantinian missiology. The church’s great gift to the world—the gospel it preaches—is not simply hospitality without referent, as noted, but announcement of a gift of life that demands, invites, woos, and ultimately cannot be received without response. The call without the gift is damaging moralism and law; the gift without the call is “cheap grace” and moral license. The church is that community which paradoxically celebrates the freedom of the gift and lives with seriousness the call, leaving the world and entering provisionally and proleptically into a different order of being. The ecclesiology of differentiation embedded in the Prayer Book practice of bap-

²⁸ After thirteen years of ministry in parishes striving to be “inclusive,” I worry that the welcome call to “inclusivity” may have fallen victim to the human inclination to idolatry. No doubt this observation may place me in some company I do not wish to keep! I am not opposed to “inclusivity,” but I am opposed to reducing the rich complexity of the gospel to a single, non-complex idea.

²⁹ The former accusation is common. For the latter, see Jean-Francois Lyotard, “Apostil on Narratives” and “Missive on Universal History” in *The Postmodern Explained: Correspondence 1982-1985*, ed. by Julian Pefanis and Morgan Thomas (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), esp. 17-19, 24-25, 29-30; Johannes B. Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, trans. David Smith (New York: Seabury, 1980), 97.

tism and eucharist, and in the catechumenate, reflects this sense of differentiated identity. The corresponding mission of the church is simultaneously to proclaim the gift of God's love and call for formation in response.

The practice of open communion arguably implies a different identity entirely. At its best, it may involve under the appearance of hospitality a kind of *laissez-faire*, liberal Constantinianism, a notion that there is no boundary between the church and the world and so the table belongs to all. At its worst, it may fail to respect genuine differences in spirituality and human experience, assuming that all who desire communion are moved by God as Christians understand God, or desire participation in the redeemed world as Christians experience it. On first glance the assumption that anyone who desires communion is moved by the Spirit seems encouraged by the view of divine existence in the first commandment and by belief in the universal soteriological significance of Jesus Christ. Yet, partners in interreligious dialogues have learned hard lessons in recent years about the Christian and mainly Western assumption that all religious practices are different manifestations of a common, universal core. Those lessons may be relevant here. This discovery of genuine and fundamental differences among formal religions—among the “salvations” for which they long and among the values to which they commit—are arguably indicative of wider human experience as well.³⁰ With this understanding, true hospitality reflects an attentive appreciation of genuine difference in human experience and a corresponding respect for boundaries. In such a world, it is hospitable to acquaint oneself with the longing of another and her understanding of God, share with respect one's own, and in the process come to discover together whether the Christian life resonates with the content of her longing. This may be a more genuine hospitality than assuming anyone moved to receive communion is *de facto* moved by or desires the divine as understood by Christians. Encouraging participation in Christian eucharist without this respect for spiritual differences may actually be disingenuous. Before we even begin to contemplate the canonical acceptance of open communion, far more reflection is required on the relationship between the claim to Christ's universal soteriological significance and the formal differences in experience and motivation for

³⁰ For an introduction to the issues referred to here, see S. Mark Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1995).

communion in those who have not yet undertaken the baptismal life. A functional and effective sense of mission in a pluralistic context may depend upon it, and the implicit Constantinian missiology of open communion has yet to offer an adequate account of the relationship between world and church.

One final observation remains to be made in this section: close to the issue of ecclesiology and mission lies the question of evangelism. Notoriously difficult to define amid the ruins of Christendom and notoriously discomfiting for Episcopalians to undertake, even as they feel its urgency, one wonders whether the practice of open communion is not an easy substitute for genuine evangelism. Does our announcement that “all are welcome at the table” substitute for compelling witness and the seriousness of formation demanded by the catechumenate? Congratulating ourselves for our eucharistic hospitality to those who manage to find their way through our doors is much easier than being a visible church engaged in public discourse, cogently challenging the prevailing modern assumptions that the world’s salvation is found in technical mastery, the worship of “progress,” or the palliatives of generic spirituality. Open communion may offer some “welcome” to those who enter the nave; humble but vigorous public engagement with the world may persuade the unconvinced that God’s work in the world is actually worth the commitment that eucharist enacts.

Open Communion and Pastoral Practice

The final concerns I wish to raise are as indebted to my experience as a parish priest as to any claim I can make to theological scholarship. Specifically, the pastoral implications of open communion must be queried within its social and philosophical context: (1) modernity’s construal of longing as an enemy, and (2) modernity’s privilege of the individual over the community. The practice may also reflect plain ignorance of the importance of clear identity and generously defined boundaries to genuine hospitality. We will consider each in turn.

The pastoral significance of longing

In the best-case scenario—that of an unbaptized person who desires to receive communion because he longs for God and for divine relationship within the church—it is considered by proponents of open communion to be a downright sin to deny that person access to

the table. How dare we say “no” to those who long to receive! Yet, what figuration of *longing* or *desire* is at work in our newfound resistance to requiring baptism before reception? It is worth asking whether the rush to satisfy the longing of the unbaptized has less to do with Christian charity or good theology than with modernity’s abhorrence of longing.

Actually, modernity has a complex relationship to longing.³¹ At the deepest level, modernity has a love for longing: an infinite deferral of longing is woven into the philosophical fabric of Western societies (and increasingly others) through the various local forms of global capitalism. The infinite deferral of longing is the engine of our economic systems. The vast machinery of the advertising industry— itself infinitely deferring the achievements of its goals by their displacement onto new objects of desire—finally supports the displacement of the object of our longing from its satisfaction to the desire itself. Freud recognized this at the psychological level, at which for various reasons we sublimate the true nature of our desire and displace it onto other objects, so that longing never ceases. That displacement of our longing in the interest of its infinite deferral occurs dialectically, however, by a short-term war on longing. Our desires must immediately be satisfied. Our ubiquitous systems of lending and borrowing are designed to satisfy desire immediately while deferring the full impact of the cost of satisfaction. Immediate gratification leads to dissatisfaction and the movement of desire to other objects (also with cost deferred), and the cycle continues. This peculiar pattern of short-term satisfaction of longing for the purpose of longing’s infinite deferral drives the widening system of global capitalism and absorbs all other value systems in its wake. (Those who doubt the hegemony of this system need only contemplate the growing phenomenon of the label-branding of sports events, cultural and artistic gatherings, and even neighborhoods.)

By prophetic contrast, the good pastor understands that human longing, rightly ordered, is neither its own ultimate object, nor the enemy of satisfaction, but is an essential and enriching dimension of

³¹ The analysis that follows is very broadly indebted to thinkers of the Frankfurt School—Horkheimer and Adorno, in particular—as well as to French theorists critical of modernism. More specifically, an excellent treatment of the modern economy of satisfaction and suffering and its contrast to a Christian economy of the same is offered by Graham Ward, “Suffering and Incarnation,” in *Suffering Religion*, ed. Robert Gibbs and Elliot R. Wolfson (New York: Routledge, 2002), 163-180.

an eschatological faith. Longing and fulfillment are mysteriously woven together in Christian faith. The object of our desire is one that transcends our grasp yet gives itself to us, even as our longing deepens. Participation in God both satisfies our longing and excites it. Liturgy shapes and patterns our desire in this way: we are baptized into a body, made one with God, yet with work yet to accomplish for all to be one. We are fed at the table, yet with a morsel of bread and a sip of wine that blesses our hunger as much as it satisfies it. In this eschatological stretch "between the times," longing for the *basileia tou theou* draws us into action toward justice, forgiveness, and the healing of broken relationships so that we do embody what we long for, but do not yet complete it. Longing, the desire for God, is woven into the very fabric of mature Christian spirituality and practice.

Properly understood, then, the desire by unbaptized persons to receive communion may not be well served by the rush to immediate gratification. The practice of doing so may well be more indebted to our social-economic values than by good pastoral sense. A better alternative, with all the grace, hospitality, and encouragement one can muster, is to invite the unbaptized into the catechumenal process recently recovered as a practical resource for formation. In the hands of a good pastor and teacher, the longing of catechumens is fertile ground for rich growth and development. The catechumenate is a time to help inquirers deepen their longing in ways that shape their action and commitment. It is my experience that those who travel this way experience their first communion as far more powerful and effective than those who participate without preparation. More than that of the unprepared participant, is not the longing of the catechumen, when baptized and fed, more fully satisfied and yet more prepared for the long journey of continuing desire that is the Christian life?

The privilege of the individual

I do not need to belabor the ascendancy of the individual in modern Western societies. While this ascendancy can be overstated, it is certainly clear that the modern turn in philosophy is one concerned with questions of the individual, especially in epistemology. Contemporary social philosophy struggles with the attempt to define proper social relations or adequate theories of justice in a context where the celebration of individual freedoms correlates with the collapse of any shared conception of the good. Modern legal systems and constitu-

tions lean heavily in favor of individual rights. We inhabit a world in which the individual's rights, desires, and interests reign unchallenged, except in the limit cases where they are threatening to others. Attempts in recent years to enrich the benefits of individual freedom with the blessing of communal identity—for example, the creation of urban and suburban public spaces that encourage social exchange—have seen only limited success.

The significance of this modern shift is obvious: the sources and practices of Christian faith reflect a concern for the social whole that is not always consistent with the imaginal world of the West. Liturgy, in particular, is the practice of a people. Participants in liturgy come as individuals who see the world through the lens of their own sins, troubles, desires, and joys. Through liturgical practice they are, over time, reoriented to a shared vision of the world, seeing it less through their own concerns and more through the lens of God's own purposes and desires for us. In liturgy, we enter into the emerging shape of a world not entirely our own and allow our own affections and inclinations to be tutored and reformed by and with the assembly.³² In baptism, our individual existence disappears as we are reborn in Christ. In eucharist, we gather at the center of the world where our own individual stories are written within the primal Christological narrative of all creation and its destiny. In liturgy, the social body rather than the individual is the basic unit of practice and reflection.

In this light, one is left to wonder about the philosophical underpinnings of the practice of open communion. Are we motivated more by the hospitality of Jesus or the modernist inclination not to stand in the way of what an individual desires, as long as it does no harm? Yet, some harm may well be done in open communion: the harm is to the social body and ultimately to the individual who perhaps approaches a very different meal than the assembly is actually celebrating. This may explain why, in parishes that have been practicing open communion, it is notoriously difficult to move people from the table to the commitment of the font. Perhaps they have been allowed to misconstrue from the beginning the very gift that the church has been given: community in Christ.

³² See the seminal essay by Don Saliers, "Liturgy and Ethics: Some New Beginnings," reprinted with responses in a festschrift for Saliers by E. Byron Anderson and Bruce T. Morrill, eds., *Liturgy and the Moral Self: Humanity at Full Stretch Before God* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1998), 15-35.

The hospitality of boundaries

“Good fences make good neighbors.” This bit of folk wisdom may be uttered cynically, but in its origin was probably intended as a positive comment on the nature of human relationship. Clear boundaries do make possible good relations; conversely, it is difficult to enter into a healthy and genuine relationship with other persons or participate in the corporate practice of a group without clarity about their nature and purpose. Anthropology, ritual studies, and psychology confirm this folk wisdom that boundaries are essential to a coherent, even if flexible, sense of identity, to a measurable and open sense of passage from one state to another, to interpersonal and group relations, and to a definable process by which the “outsider” gets “inside.” Challenging the differentiation represented by boundaries as an assault on the gospel is a category error: the function of boundaries is not necessarily judgment or exclusion, but definition and even invitation. Jesus’ own challenge to the temple leaders of his time manifested differentiation between those inside and outside the purposes of God; it is possible to read his treatment of boundaries not as their elimination, but their felicitous confounding and reorientation.

Confusing the clear differentiation between outsiders and insiders fails to acknowledge the universally productive function of boundaries and may actually make it more difficult to welcome the newcomer or outsider. This is borne out by my own experience of working with new member incorporation, in which newcomers do not become anxious or alienated by a clear sense of parish expectations for participation, as long as those expectations (including baptism) are presented not as the demand of law but as the invitation to life. To the contrary, newcomers become anxious and frustrated when the parish lacks a clear sense of expectation and process—even when this lack is intentionally designed to be hospitable! People are not generally offended by boundaries, but need to pass over their clear demarcation as signposts of their own journeys.

In this connection, one priest of my acquaintance—a proponent of open communion—claims that “we have made it too difficult to be part of the church” and sees baptism as an “obstacle” to participation. But it simply does not follow that boundaries are obstacles: whether we stand in front of the baptismal waters guarding them from the world, or stand with arms outstretched over the waters in a posture of invitation, has to do with how fully we have been formed in the bap-

tismal life, not with the expectation that baptism precedes eucharist. Furthermore, in my experience, the unfortunate inhospitality that marks some parishes has little to do with either baptismal or eucharistic discipline. As the reader can no doubt confirm by his or her own experience, I have known parishes that maintain a closed attitude toward newcomers, even though they baptize non-members right and left with little preparation and officially encourage all to communion; conversely, I have known (and served) radically inclusive, generous parishes marked by a highly developed commitment to baptismal discipline and the catechumenate, which would never consider the communion of non-Christians to be sound. An expectation of baptism as the condition for participation at the table simply does not stand in a one-for-one relationship with inhospitality. Baptism is a boundary, and boundaries are not necessarily obstacles. Before we open our eucharistic tables without requiring, in a generous spirit, a baptismal process of formation and entry, we should reconsider whether such an opening signifies our hospitality or simply a retreat from the field of evangelism and formation. People are seeking life: the church has found life in Christ, who nourishes the church with his own body. Better than offering open communion, the church might well consider how to hold out its hands in invitation over the waters. Then others, too, can be so nourished, receiving that extravagant gift that is both utterly free and costs not less than everything.