

metaphysical imagining, in the poem and the music, which tell of pain and hope, of the flesh which is said to have the taste of ash and the spirit which is said to have the savor of fire, are always Sabbatarian. They have arisen out of an immensity of waiting which is that of man. Without them, how could we be patient?⁸⁹

How, indeed, can we be patient? There are times for holy impatience. There are times for patience.⁹⁰ It is a matter that calls for discernment. We are engaged in just that sort of discernment. Freeman noted more than once that, but for the rules language, there has been, perhaps until more recently, a significant place for prudential discernment on the part of bishops in questions of intercommunion. God grant them prudence. God grant us patience. Much may be at stake.

In his *Apology*, Saint Justin Martyr commended patience as an aspect of Christian witness. This panel occurs on the day of his memorial. This evening, we will gather in prayer commemorating him. May our prayers join with his in our being made a patient people.

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V. Fulfilling the Rules

I am an unapologetic admirer of rules. In fact, one of my friends has dubbed me “the rule follower.” So, I greatly appreciate Curtis Freeman’s careful delineation of Baptist as well as Catholic rules for intercommunion

⁸⁹ George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 231–32, quoted in Philip H. Pfatteicher, *Liturgical Spirituality* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 103.

⁹⁰ I wish to be very careful here. Too often, patience has been counseled as a means to preserve an oppressive status quo. One thinks of the critique of white moderates in Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.” I do not believe this question has the same immediacy of urgency.

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and commend his quite appropriate apprehension about “breaking the rules.” To ignore these rules subverts the sacred reality that intercommunion is seeking to promote. But what if, instead of thinking about how to avoid breaking the rules, we gave serious attention to what fulfilling these rules might mean? Is there any circumstance in which faithful Baptists might partake in communion with their equally faithful Catholic brothers and sisters that might actually affirm these rules that guide and limit intercommunion? I take this approach to the question of intercommunion relying on two sources. First, the rules themselves, especially the recognition of “profound spiritual need,” invite spiritual discernment as much as canonical jurisprudence. Second, these rules share an affinity with “Rule,” long in the Christian tradition, understood as a detailed guide for a communal way of life that gradually forms participants into the life of Christ.

I acknowledge from the outset that these reflections offer little by way of practical advice for approaching a local ordinary with a request to permit all baptized Christians who so desire to receive the Body and Blood of Christ at a future College Theology Society celebration of the Eucharist. What I want to affirm in this response is the friendship rooted in shared faith in Christ that has developed over the nearly two decades in which members of the College Theology Society and members of the National Baptist Professors of Religion, region-at-large, have gathered annually. Through this faith-filled friendship, we have come to recognize a profound spiritual need to enact our life together as members of Christ’s Body when we gather for Eucharist. It is this need that has led to a discussion of intercommunion and the possibility of seeking such permission from a local ordinary.

The rules for intercommunion acknowledge the Eucharist’s salvific power with their inclusion of “profound spiritual need” as a reason for allowing intercommunion. Where is the site of this need? The guidelines, as Freeman presents them, focus on an individual’s disposition in eucharistic reception. This focus makes sense, given that each person must examine his or her conscience to ensure that there is no impediment to reception. Such an expectation is true for everyone, including Catholics. Yet, communion, as the name suggests is profoundly communal. We gather together as a community to receive the sacramental life in our hearing of the gospel and our consuming the consecrated bread and wine. The profound spiritual need dwells most assuredly in each person seeking communion, and it is critical to remember that it also dwells in that community gathered. The first apostles risked their very lives to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with anyone who might listen and to perpetuate life in Christ by gathering all baptized believers around the altar of the Lord to share in that life through the Eucharist. So the spiritual need is ours together insofar as we have come to

a real understanding, that is, a concrete, practical understanding, of that togetherness as constituting the Mystical Body of Christ. Our life together in faith intensifies our spiritual need to participate in this life of Christ.

This communal focus leads to a broader consideration of rules. Rules, if they are truly good rules, articulate something of their end. One of the best rules that I know is that of Saint Benedict—a guide to grow in what Benedict called the monastic way of life—a radically communal way of life. Following the Rule is the means to that end, but few—perhaps none—begin with the fullness of virtue or even the right disposition for the monastic way of life. The Rule is often followed partially, imperfectly on the way to dwelling within its boundaries—the boundaries that define the deep and wide space of God’s abundant love and mercy. Saint Benedict wrote his Rule to guide the monastic community, which he called “a school in the Lord’s service,” a community always learning how to “run the way of God’s commandments with expanded hearts and unspeakable sweetness of love.” The learning requires dedicated participation to “share in the sufferings of Christ, and [thus to] be found worthy to be coheirs with Him of His kingdom.”⁹¹ So, is there any way in which our participation in intercommunion might bear some semblance to Benedict’s monks following the Rule to which they are committed and yet do not fully embody? Is there any way in which a deeply intentional practice of intercommunion in particular settings such as the annual gathering of members of the College Theology Society and those of the NABPR might be a witness to the rules around intercommunion, in particular of that profound spiritual need for the healing of our brokenness as a Christian community, for a foretaste, however fleeting, of the fullness of life by communion, which is Christ’s Body?

The rules for intercommunion invite us to consider the reality of the sacramental grace that we Catholics cherish in our participation in the Eucharist with all believers present in the liturgical assembly. It is in our bodily participation in this practice of thanksgiving that we feed our deep and abiding hunger and quench our thirst for God. It also stimulates our hunger and thirst for justice: for the righteousness of God, for that beatitude, that blessing, that comes to those reaching out to receive Christ’s Body and Blood. It is precisely because we cherish the power of Christ manifest in this great sacrament that we voice this deep spiritual need to embody this communion that we have come to experience over our nearly two decades of praying and thinking

⁹¹ Rule of Benedict, Prol., p. 3, in *The Holy Rule of St. Benedict* by Saint Benedict, Abbot of Monte Cassino, trans. Rev. Boniface Verheyen, OSB, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, Grand Rapids, MI.

together about our lives of faith. Together, the Baptists and Catholics are like the woman who dared to touch the hem of Jesus's garment in her desperate pursuit of healing. We too seek healing for the long-standing disease of the Body—in this case the Body of Christ. Perhaps we can come to the table together with all due humility to touch the healing grace that is the promise and substance of the Eucharist to further Christ's work in restoring his Body for the life of the world.

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VI. Discerning the Questions

I want to begin by expressing my appreciation to Curtis Freeman for his comments. I have been reflecting on this topic since it was first mentioned as a possibility. What Freeman has offered serves us well as a beginning to this very important conversation. Hopefully, I can add to that beginning.

I want to provide a context for my remarks. Each year since I began attending the College Theology Society annual convention, I have attended Mass on Saturday night, processed toward the altar, crossed my arms, and received a blessing. I have also often done so when I attended midweek Mass during my time as a Baptist student in a Catholic doctoral program. Moreover, when I occasionally attend Mass at the parish adjacent to the Baptist university where I teach, I do the same and instruct any of my non-Catholic students who join me to do likewise. To be sure, the question of whether it is possible for me to do otherwise in one of these settings is a very pertinent one for me.

In response to the proposal by Freeman, I think it best to offer several questions. They are pragmatic, theological, and perhaps a bit existential.

First, what is the goal here? Are we looking to have a onetime occasion for shared communion or a more regular practice? Each can do important ecumenical work and therefore is worth pursuing. When the first Baptist World Congress met in London in 1905, Alexander Maclaren asked those gathered to recite the Apostles' Creed. They did so as a signal to the rest of the

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