

Risky Food and Eucharistic Hospitality: What Should Christians Tell Adherents of Other Religions about Participation in Holy Communion?

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The description of the Practical Theology, Worship, and Spirituality working group suggests the following question: “Can Christians worship together with Jews, Muslims, and others and remain true to distinctively Christian teachings and practices?” I would like to invert this question to ask, “Can Jews, Muslims and others remain true to their distinctive religious commitments while participating in Christian worship?”

This is a huge question, obviously, and I begin with the disclaimer that I will not try to answer this question from the side of other religions. I concede that it may be very possible for a devotee of some religions, Hinduism for example, to participate in Christian worship on their own terms and without fear that this violates their basic belief system or religious practices. What I want to explore in this thought experiment is this: Regardless of the beliefs of others, what should Christians tell (let us say “warn”) non-Christian attenders about the effects of participation in Christian worship, focusing on the specific case of the Lord’s Supper?

### **A Brief Look at Early Christian Practice**

Some may assume that non-Christians participation in Christian worship is a relatively modern dilemma, a welcome progress in western democratic societies beyond the sad history of religious wars that have marred human history. On the other hand, the church has wrestled with this possibility from its beginning. Paul addressed the fundamental incompatibility of participation in pagan sacrificial meals and Christian communal meals in his first letter to the Corinthians: “You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and table of demons” (I Cor. 10:21). Later in the same letter, Paul states, “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord” and “all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves.” (I Cor. 11:27, 30). In the context of the problems at Corinth, Paul is specifically concerned with disregard for the poor in the Corinthian community. Eating “in an unworthy manner” means eating without honoring and fully-including the poor. But early Christian leaders took these admonitions as proof texts for unworthy participation generally, and even expanded upon the restrictions they implied. To cite just one example, The *Apostolic Tradition* (of Hippolytus, so-called) forbade the un-baptized to pray and share the kiss of peace with the baptized during morning gatherings for instruction.<sup>1</sup> Not “sharing in the table of demons” expanded into not “sharing the kiss of peace with the uninitiated.”

The earliest restriction of the Eucharist to the baptized appears in the pseudonymous *Didache (The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles)*, which can safely be dated to the late first century or even earlier:

But let no one eat or drink of your Thanksgiving (Eucharist), but they who have been baptized into the name of the Lord; for concerning this also the Lord hath said, Give not that which is holy to the dogs.<sup>ii</sup>

We may note the unintended irony of quoting Jesus without also noting the Syrophenician Woman's snappy come back, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs" (Mark 7:28). Nevertheless, three centuries later (late 4<sup>th</sup> century), another writer expanded upon the core of the *Didache* in book seven of the so-called *Apostolic Constitutions* with a different proof-text:

Let no one eat of these things that is not initiated; but those only who have been baptized into the death of the Lord. But if any one that is not initiated conceal himself, and partake of the same, "he eats eternal damnation;" because, being not of the faith of Christ, he has partaken of such things as it is not lawful for him to partake of, to his own punishment.<sup>iii</sup>

This later writer makes use of Paul's warning to the Corinthian church to restrict the table to the baptized. But perhaps this suggests more than a mere restriction. The writer speaks of someone who might "conceal himself," which implies faking status as a fully-initiated believer. We might wonder why anyone would want to do that. Is it possible the writer has in mind a person who wants to receive the Eucharist, but who is not willing to go through the intensive process and social restrictions of the catechumenate? I think this is a reasonable assumption. Entering into the catechumenate could have tremendous social ramifications –not being able to "eat of the table of demons" for example, or not being allowed to fully participate in various pagan domestic rituals, or in the case of a soldier, gladiator, prostitute, magistrate, or painter of idols, not being able to make a living, as these professions were proscribed for catechumens and the baptized.

This same passage in *Apostolic Constitutions* goes on with a further example: "But if anyone is a partaker through ignorance, instruct him quickly, and initiate him, that he may not go out and despise you." What sort of person does this imply? Could they be persons who mistakenly think they have been properly initiated, but who have in fact not received a proper, orthodox baptism? That sort of problem did occur, and we a fascinating letter from Bishop Dionysius of Alexandria to Sixtus of Rome in the mid-third century that describes such a case and its ramifications for Eucharistic participation.<sup>iv</sup> However, that does not seem to be the case in *Apostolic Constitutions*. Rather, I suggest this passage refers to someone who partakes without understanding that initiation by baptism is a requirement. If the first example implies someone who is acting with duplicity, the second implies someone who is simply clueless. If I am correct, this means that the early church was not as careful about rigidly policing the table as we contemporary historians have sometimes assumed. In the early church, liturgical texts indicate that catechumens were dismissed before the prayers of the faithful in the Eucharistic liturgies, which would categorically prohibit un-believers from receiving communion. There are numerous examples of liturgical rules from the early church that declare a strict policing of the table, but these rules may also be evidence of how sloppily such rules were applied. As Paul Bradshaw argues, authoritative-sounding liturgical legislation in the early church does not necessarily mean that churches followed such legislation, and stronger arguments for a practice may be a sign of

*lack* of widespread practice (“weak point, point pulpit”). On the other hand, strongly-worded prohibitions are almost always evidence that the practice is regularly occurring. Otherwise, why bother arguing against it?<sup>v</sup> In short, while early Christian ecclesiastical leaders strongly urged a strict policing of the Lord’s Table, the actual practice of many congregations may have been much more open, and particularly in urban areas where it would be difficult to control. Over the objections of theologians and bishops, an unknown number of un-baptized persons almost certainly received the Eucharist in the Patristic churches.

In a similar vein, until fairly recently, church historians assumed that the division between the church and synagogue took place early in the Common Era. Current scholarship on this question no longer accepts that the division took place so soon, or that it was popularly enforced until late antiquity. In the early fifth century, for example, John Chrysostom preached against Christians attending synagogue. But why would he take time to condemn this if Christians (in some noticeable number) were not attending Jewish worship? That being the case, there is little reason to assume that members of synagogues did not also, on occasion, attend church, but without feeling any compulsion to convert.

The “problem” of non-baptized persons receiving Holy Communion and of persons going back-and-forth between religious communities, therefore, is not a modern development. It has been around since the early centuries of the church. Indeed, such practices illustrate the phenomenon Ramsey MacMullen has dubbed “the second church,” the synchronistic popular Christianity of the majority of persons who associated with the church in the early centuries. This popular Christianity could vary considerably from the church promoted by the patristic theologians and bishops.<sup>vi</sup> If popular Christianity was less restrictive, nevertheless, one may search in vain for early Christian leaders (orthodox or heretical) who promoted communing non-baptized persons, or who advocated for anything like modern inter-religious worship. While there may be all sorts of sociological and historical reasons for this divergence between the educated leaders and the popular religious practices of the masses, educated theologians addressed this as a problem of church discipline, religious integrity, and also as concern for the harm it could potentially do naïve communicant.

## A Brief Look at Early Methodist Practice

Appeals to the early church may be instructive, but for our purposes the thought and practice of John Wesley may have more weight. While Wesley did not directly comment on the matter of admitting adherents of other religions to the communion table, recent discussions of the Methodist “open table” often appeal to Wesley as their authority for not requiring baptism as a pre-requisite for admission to communion. We can point to Mark Stamm’s argument for the United Methodist “liturgical exception” regarding the practice of a completely open table that does not require as a matter of principle that communicants be baptized.<sup>vii</sup> Theodore Runyon, my colleague at Emory, now retired, is also a supporter of an open communion table; he bases his support in part on his reading of early Methodist practice.

In his book, *The New Creation*, Runyon appeals to John Wesley’s practice of holding “field communions” as evidence that Wesley was unconcerned about any sort of restriction for admission to the table.<sup>viii</sup> But despite Runyon’s assumptions about such meetings, I have not been able to find actual evidence of Wesley holding “field communions.”<sup>ix</sup> [Note to readers: if you know of concrete evidence of field communions, please let me know!] Wesley was present at communions where more than a thousand communed --not thousands, but hundreds—and

some Anglicans saw this as a nuisance. But there is no indication that the ordinary requirements of communion did not apply, with one notable exception. As John Boymer notes, “Wesley did not demand confirmation as necessary for admission to the Lord’s Supper.”<sup>x</sup> This put him at odds with Anglican teaching and practice.<sup>xi</sup> Nevertheless, Wesley did not see baptism *alone* as sufficient for admission to the table. Boymer cites the Minutes of the Conference of 1747 as the beginning of the use of communion tickets for admission to the table:

Q. 5—How shall we keep of unwary (unworthy) communicants?

- A. 1. By being exactly careful whom we admit into Society and,
- 2. By giving notes to none but those who come to us on the days appointed in each quarter.<sup>xii</sup>

It seems to me to be an exaggeration to say, as Runyon does in *The New Creation*, that Wesley used large, public services of Holy Communion as outreach to the masses, parallel to his practice of field preaching.<sup>xiii</sup>

Nevertheless, I do think that Runyon is correct to infer that baptism *per se* was not the issue for Wesley. The issue was repentance. Throughout the nineteenth century, for example, Methodist disciplines in the U.S, both north and south, would carry the stipulation “No person shall be admitted to the Lord’s Supper among us who is guilty of any practice for which we would exclude a member of our Church.”<sup>xiv</sup> T. O. Summers, in his *Commentary on the Ritual of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, 1873, makes no remark on this particular rubric, but does note that the Invitation “sets for the character of those who are welcomed to the Lord’s table....*Ye that do truly and earnestly repent of your sins, --It would be preposterous for an impenitent sinner to come.*”<sup>xv</sup> R. J. Cooke, in his *History of the Ritual of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (1900), cites Justin Martyr for the precedent that historically only the baptized faithful were allowed to commune. He comments:

It might appear from the Invitation in the Ritual that only such persons now are invited; but in our opinion it would be putting a too critical interpretation upon that Invitation if it should rigorously exclude a repentant sinner, who, in his heart, ‘intended to lead a new life.’ Nevertheless, no profane or wicked person should, under any circumstances, be permitted to take this Sacrament into his unholy hands...<sup>xvi</sup>

The stipulation that no one may be admitted to communion who could not be admitted into the church was part of Methodist Episcopal disciplines well into the twentieth century (dropping out in 1912 in the north, but not until the merger of 1939 for the south). I add, parenthetically, that the 1992 *United Methodist Book of Worship* is clearly wrong in its assertion that “We have no tradition of refusing any who present themselves desiring to receive.”<sup>xvii</sup>

The question of whether Wesley required baptism as a pre-requisite for communing is linked to his understanding of Holy Communion as a “converting ordinance.” From 2001-4, the United Methodist study of Holy Communion held listening posts throughout the United States and in several other parts of the world. In virtually every listening post held in the United States, John Wesley’s reference to Holy Communion as a “converting ordinance” was brought into the discussion as the definitive Wesleyan understanding of the sacrament. What did not enter in to

the discussion was any notice of the dead seriousness of Wesley's understanding of "conversion." I suggest United Methodists were misunderstanding Wesley's use of "converting ordinance" in much the same way modern Methodists have misunderstood his use of the phrase "bar tunes" to justify using popular music in worship. (Disclaimer—I'm very much in favor of using contemporary music, even though the term "bar tunes" has nothing to do with the pub music in eighteenth century England.)

For Wesley, the term, "converting ordinance," was embedded in theological discussions of the order of salvation and the purpose of sacraments. Wesley thought that the majority of baptized Christians were not believers in the sense of having been converted or having been justified before God. However, for Wesley, neither the assurance of salvation nor the experience of conversion was prerequisite to fruitful communion. This set him apart from more Calvinist understandings that conversion must precede fruitful communion. But this did not mean that he believed Holy Communion had no requirements. In his journal, Wesley provides an outline of a sermon preached on June 28, 1740 that is very interesting on this matter:

"I showed at large, 1) that the Lord's supper was ordained by God to be a means of conveying to men either preventing or justifying, or sanctifying grace, according to their several necessities; 2) that the persons for whom it was ordained are all those who know and feel that they want the grace of God, either to restrain them from sin, or to show their sins forgiven, or to renew their souls in the image of God; 3) that inasmuch as we come to his table, not to give him anything but to receive whatsoever he sees best for us, there is no previous preparation indispensable necessary, but a desire to receive whatsoever he pleases to give; and 4) that no fitness is required at the time of communicating but a sense of our state, of our utter sinfulness and helplessness; everyone who knows he is fit for hell being just fit to come to Christ in this as well as all other ways of his appointment."

We could summarize Wesley's argument:

1. What sort of grace is offered in the Lord's Supper? All sorts for persons at every stage of believing.
2. Who is invited to the table? Those who intentionally want the grace of God's power and forgiveness to overcome sin and be renewed God's image.
3. What preparation is necessary? The desire to receive what God gives--i.e. see point two.
4. Who is fit to receive? Those who know their utter sinfulness and helplessness.

Wesley thus understood "converting ordinance," not as an argument for a radically open table, but as a need for a disciplined table, where genuine conversion could be experienced in genuine repentance. Wesley's "converting ordinance" contrasts with those in his day who understood the Eucharist as a "confirming ordinance." For Wesley, communicants did not need to be already convinced they were justified to receive the grace appropriate to their stage in the *ordo salutis*. Yet Wesley did argue that communicants must be convinced of their need and demonstrate this by a willingness to seek the power to overcome sin. Whether un-baptized persons ever came to Methodist communion services and received the sacrament cannot be proven one way or the

other. Nevertheless, it is clear that Wesley would have wanted everyone who communed to have a desire to receive the powerful grace of God to overcome their sin.

## Present United Methodist Theology and Practice of an Open Table

In regard to present use of Wesleyan history, it is anachronistic to assume that we would find exact precedents for contemporary practices. A better way to appeal to Wesley is to ask if there is anything in his teaching or practice that could be the beginning of a developmental trajectory toward our current practice. Here the appeal is made, not to Wesley's disciplined approach to Holy Communion or to the class meeting, but to his ministry among the un-churched and impoverished lower social class. The most significant first principle is not "conversion" or "discipline," (which would come later) but "openness" and "hospitality," first welcoming the alienated in order to bring them to saving faith. For many United Methodists, both lay and clergy, "openness" of the table in United Methodist church is perceived to be a key mark of Methodist identity—something that distinguishes us from both Roman Catholics and Southern Baptists. While other churches may limit communicants to their own members, United Methodists welcome everyone, "Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors," open tables. Moreover, many United Methodist congregations go beyond the conventional ecumenical sense in which an open table means "opened to baptized Christians in good standing from other Christian ecclesial communities." Rather, United Methodist openness typically means openness to everyone who may be present at the communion service—be they Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist or curious agnostic.

United Methodists express openness as a matter hospitality using a variety of arguments. As noted above, Mark Stamm (among others) has proposed that United Methodists draw on the Eucharistic imagery in the gospel stories of Jesus feeding the multitudes in addition to the story of the Last Supper as a justification of the open table.<sup>xviii</sup> In this approach, as Jesus' public meal is hospitably open to all who are present, so should be our Eucharist.

Another argument for a radically open table goes like this: we do not invite guests to our home, but then refuse them to share in our meals. That would be rude. Similarly, how can we refuse our communion meal to persons whom we invite (at least implicitly invite) to worship? Polite hospitality demands openness.

A third argument for the radically open table appeals to the stories of people who have experienced (rightly or wrongly in their perception) the rejection of the church. If we ask these wounded persons to delay communion until they are baptized, or until they willing to seek repentance (and who could decide readiness on this count?), they may perceive this as another example of the rejection by the church. I will not address this particular argument, since it is not specifically relevant to the question of other religions.

Let us consider first two arguments for the radically open table briefly and in the order above.

### *Jesus Public Feeding Miracles as Examples of the Open Table*

It is common today for biblical and historical scholars of worship to situate early Christian Eucharistic practice, not merely in the accounts of Jesus' Last Supper, but in relationship to the wider variety of meals described in the gospels. The feeding miracles, for

example, contain the action verbs of the “four-fold shape” of the Eucharistic liturgy identified by Gregory Dix in his classic study *The Shape of the Liturgy*: Jesus “took” the loaves and fish, “blessed” and “broke” the loaves, and “gave” them to his disciples to distribute (see Mark 6:41). A model for Eucharistic participation based on the feeding miracle yields a different precedent for participation in the meal. Baptism is certainly not a requirement, nor is any strong notion of prior religious commitment.

James Farwell, an Episcopal liturgical theologian, describes a typical way this argument goes: Jesus practiced a totally open table practice (he ate with sinners, tax collectors, Samaritans, Romans and other Gentiles) as an enactment of the eschatological banquet of God. This was the earliest Christian Eucharistic practice. Very soon after his death, however, Christians began to focus on Jesus’ Last Supper as the origin and core of the Eucharistic meal., Paul is usually blamed for this development. The discovery of this conceptual shift is a major achievement of late modern Jesus scholarship (the Jesus Seminar).<sup>xx</sup>

Farwell suggests some major problems with this sort of argument. First, it over-relies on certain modern methods for determining the historical Jesus and then posits this historically reconstructed Jesus as the basis for Christian theological claims. (Thank God, modern biblical scholars are finally correcting the malicious errors of Paul!) But perhaps a larger problem is the way this argument collapses all meal practice into a univocal social action. Historically, Jews (as most ancient people) did not see all meals as one thing. There is ample evidence that Jews applied different rules to their festival meals (the *Seder*, for example) and Sabbath meals and other family meals and practices. Holding aside for the moment the interesting historical question of whether the Last Supper was a *Seder*, it is still unsound to assume that Jesus would not have followed these same rules for distinguishing religious meals from ordinary daily meals, or found them problematic. Certainly, Jesus pushed the boundaries of who might share table fellowship for ordinary meals, and he arguably used these meals as a prophetic sign of God eschatological banquet. But that is different question from asking if he thought religious-ritual meals should be open to everyone. Some Jewish ritual meals enacted a different sort of commitment, specifically a commitment to the God of Israel. There is no compelling reason to assume these different meals must be at theological odds with each other; rather, as Farwell suggests, for Jesus and the early church they acted in tandem: commitment to Jesus (and the God of Israel) in the Lord’s Supper entailed an eschatological openness to all people for God’s mission in the world. The more restricted Lord’s Supper was a motivation for missional outreach. There is an inevitable “insider-outsider” dualism here, but it is the dualism of an old philosophical joke: There are two kinds of people in the world; those who divide the people into two kinds and those who don’t. The Christian Eucharist requires Christians to be the kind of people who don’t, but that still divides Christians from those who do! In short, some meals require religious commitment (and conversion); some do not. Yet even if the New Testament evidence for Jesus’ historical practice does not give a firm precedent for a radically open table, it does not explicitly forbid it, either. For such restrictions, we do need Paul (or possibly the Gospel of John, chapter 6).

### *Meal Hospitality as the Principle of an Open Table*

No one would invite a guest to his or her home for a visit during mealtime, but then refuse to feed when the family sat together and ate dinner. By analogy, if Christians invite people to worship we must be prepared to offer them the Eucharist, our ritual family meal. This

argument is compelling for many apart from any biblical or theological discussion. While this argument also assumes that all meals are equivalent (a point to which I'll return shortly), it deserves some serious theological analysis. In what way is inviting guests to worship (and Eucharist) equivalent to inviting a guest to dinner?

The possibility of “guests” coming to the Christian Eucharist may be suggested in I Corinthians 14. At the very least, Paul acknowledges “outsiders” (may we assume these are non-baptized seekers?) present at Christian gatherings. Paul instructs the Corinthians to adapt their practices in order to accommodate these visitors, specifically to suppress their exuberant practices of glossolalia. That said, it is clear the reason for this is to enable outsiders to understand so they may be able to participate, and also to “bow down before God and worship him” (I. Cor. 14:25). In short, for Paul, participation in worship for an outsider would be, to use the Wesleyan term, a “converting ordinance.” The point is not mere graciousness to guests, but conversion. That is hardly comparable to contemporary norms of table etiquette.

The patristic Church, as noted above, had an official policy of dismissing non-Christian seekers and catechumens before the Eucharistic portion of the worship service. If only the baptized are officially and normally present, then the question of non-Christian’s communing is settled *a priori*. But this practice has not been enforced for centuries. While some eighteenth and nineteenth century Methodists forbade outsiders at Love Feasts, even that practice has long disappeared. Today Methodists earnestly hope that visitors will come to worship services of all sorts, sacramental or otherwise, and worship is a principal venue for evangelism. Therefore, we must deal with the problem of having guests in worship: can we properly invite them to worship, but not include them in the ritual meal?

Apart from the ritual meals of Christians and Jews, it is difficult to conceive of any other meals in which anyone could, with impunity, exclude another class of people categorically. In the United States, the history of Jim Crow laws in the southern states has made American Christians particularly sensitive on this issue. While race and religion are not entirely equivalent, there are historical, social similarities in the history of discrimination. On the one hand, open meal/serving practices are a matter of civil rights with economic ramifications. On the other hand, actually sharing table fellowship implicitly expresses openness to diversity, and whether or not such sharing is motivated by explicitly Christian convictions (or motivated by sincere convictions of any sort), matters little. Christians could still interpret such sharing as a sign of Jesus’ eschatological banquet and would want (should want) to model this in their fellowship meals.

Nonetheless, in some cases, even non-religious meal practice may require a gracious warning to guests. Hosts serving a meal with hot peppers would properly warn unwary guests: “This is very spicy.” Of course, it would not take long for an unwary guest to find that out. That is why a thoughtful host would issue the warning beforehand.

Sometimes, however, the offending ingredient is not so obvious. I once took a couple of my “city friends” to my grandmother’s farm for lunch. Grandmother was a fine country cook, and she had prepared a delicious stew. As we were all enjoying our meal, I commented on how much I liked the stew—as my friends heartily agreed. Grandmother responded: “You must thank your Aunt Mary. She gave me the squirrels.” That was the end of lunch for my friends. They may have enjoyed the taste, but they resolutely did not want to be the sort of people who ate squirrels.

My grandmother certainly did not intend to offend her guests. If she had known beforehand my friends had scruples about eating squirrels, she would have warned them. Or, if

she had not mentioned the squirrel meat, my friends would have eaten in ignorant bliss. But that would not change the fact that my friends had, by actual physical participation, become squirrel eaters. They would have *wanted to know that beforehand*. At the risk of proposing what looks like a banal children's sermon illustration (the squirrel is Jesus!), I do think the analogy is instructive. If we, as good Wesleyans, believe that the Lord's Supper is a converting (and justifying, and sanctifying) ordinance, then ordinary rules of hospitality would suggest that we announce that. The historic way Methodists have done this is by issuing a clear and bracingly-worded invitation: "Ye that do truly and earnestly repent of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbors, and intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking form henceforth in his holy ways; draw near with faith..." The current United Methodist ritual makes the Christological aspects more obvious: "Christ our Lord invites to his table all who love him..." At the very least, this Invitation warns our guests what this particular meal entails.

Let us consider what Christians do in the Lord's Supper. In the Great Thanksgiving of the current United Methodist ritual, we pray over the elements, "Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ that we may be for the world, the body of Christ redeemed by his blood. Make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world..." That is the language of sacramental union. If we *mean* this prayer in any ordinary way, then we have acknowledged ourselves to be in union with Christ and the Church. Or, as Charles Wesley expresses this sacramental union: "Who thy Mysterious Supper share, Here at the Table fed, Many and yet but One we are, One undivided Bread."<sup>xx</sup> Through Holy Communion, we join our bodies to Christ's Body; we are part of the family. This is the danger of participation in the Lord's Supper for anyone who is not a Christian disciple. Through it, God intends to make us one with Christ, whether we have any conscious understanding of this or not.

I certainly do not want to suggest that if non-Christians eat the bread and wine of the Eucharist without understanding the theological significance, it will do them mental or physical harm—a crass reading of Paul's warning to the Corinthian Church (I Cor. 11:30). Nevertheless, I do suggest participation in the Eucharist physically and really does something whether we realize it or not—it physically and in real time unites us with a body of persons who are declaring their desire and pledging their intention to be one with the body of Christ. It does this even for communicants who are not conscious of it, including young children, persons with mental disabilities and by extension any non-Christian who happen to participate naively. Gracious hospitality would require the church to be up-front about that.

And gracious hospitality would not insist that if a person does not want to eat that squirrel, they are refusing hospitality. I have on occasion attended communion services where the presider was so adamant about "everyone being welcome" that it would have been awkward for a non-Christian attender to refuse to take communion. That is not hospitality; that is manipulation. At the very least visitors must be allowed a gracious way to say, "No, thank you."

### **Concluding Proposals: Offering Non-Christian Visitors the Eucharist as Risky Food**

As I have tried to show in the brief historical survey, while the question of non-Christian participation in the Eucharist is not new, the introduction of the principle of hospitality into the discussion is very recent. Historically, the church approached this as a matter of church discipline and the theological integrity of Christian initiation. In contemporary popular discussion, hospitality takes precedent over discipline. But, rather than dismissing this

development as easy liberalism, I suggest we receive it as an evangelical corrective to the historical church's sad history of social and racial discrimination. Even so, on the principle of gracious hospitality, we owe our guests an honest account of what communing entails. I have further argued that communing poses a risk to the integrity of the beliefs of these guests. How should churches deal with this problem?

Some churches announce explicitly that the table is open to the only baptized, either as part of an invitation to the table, or as a printed announcement in a bulletin, as in "All who are baptized Christians are welcome to commune." Even though this expresses the historic tradition of the Christian church regarding the minimal requirement for participation in the Eucharist, I do not support this approach. An explicit refusal of all non-initiated persons would, in my opinion, violate the popular canons of hospitality—and create a scandal to use a biblical phrase.<sup>xxi</sup> I do *not* intend to suggest that the historic order of baptism before admission to the table as the normative shape of initiation ought to be set aside. On this point, I embrace the United Methodist teaching document, *This Holy Mystery*. I am merely arguing against announcing explicitly during the service that "only the baptized may come to the table." I oppose this because a) such a direction would be an addition to the official ritual and as such b) it would be construed as arbitrary by congregation, and possibly our guests.

Nevertheless, in the interest of hospitality, we must have clearly-worded Invitations that declare the risk of communion for non-believers. Wesleyans have particular insight into the risk: Holy Communion is a converting ordinance. If you partake of this meal, you have joined a community that intends to be one with the Body of Christ. Jesus declared, "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them" (John 6:56). If a visitor is willing to take that risk, so be it. God be praised. But we must allow visitors a gracious way to say "No, I do not want to be part of that."

Away, therefore, with Invitations to the table that obscure the risk of the Eucharist for the sake of an easy or manipulative hospitality. They lack the theological virtue of truthfulness.

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<sup>i</sup> *Apostolic Tradition* 18:1-3.

<sup>ii</sup> *Didache* 9, trans. ANF, vol. 7.

<sup>iii</sup> *Apostolic Constitutions* 7:25, trans. ANF, vol. 7.

<sup>iv</sup> L. Edward Phillips, "The Proof is in the Eating: Dionysius of Alexandria and the Rebaptism Controversy," in *Studia Liturgica Diversa*, Maxwell E. Johnson and L. Edward Phillips, eds. (Portland: Pastoral Press, 2004), 53-64.

<sup>v</sup> Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, second edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 17-8.

<sup>vi</sup> Ramsay MacMullen, *The Second Church: Popular Christianity, A.D. 200-400* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009).

<sup>vii</sup> *Let Every Soul Be Jesus' Guest* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006).

<sup>viii</sup> Here I reference he email exchange with Runyon he graciously allowed me to print in my essay "Open Hearts and Closed Minds: United Methodist Attitudes Toward the Open Communion Table," *Liturgy*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (2005) pp. 27-36.

<sup>ix</sup> T. Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998) 128, 137, 210. Despite these references, Runyon does not offer any specific evidence of "field communions," presumably similar to Wesley's "field preaching," *per se*, but only of services with hundreds of communicants.

<sup>x</sup> John C. Boymer, *The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in Early Methodism* (London: Dacre Press, 1951) 103.

<sup>xi</sup> *Ibid*, 104. Wesley omits confirmation from the *Sunday Service* he sent to the America for the use of Methodists in 1784.

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<sup>xii</sup> *Ibid*, 116.

<sup>xiii</sup> *The New Creation*, 137.

<sup>xiv</sup> Example from *Discipline of the M.E. Church*, 1876, Par 40.

<sup>xv</sup> *Commentary on the Ritual of the M.E. Church, South* (Nashville: Ah. H. Redford, 1873) 19.

<sup>xvi</sup> *History of the Ritual of the M.E. Church* (Cincinnati: Jennings & Pye, 1900) 241.

<sup>xvii</sup> *BOW* 29

<sup>xviii</sup> Mark W. Stamm, "Open Communion as a United Methodist Exception," *Quarterly Review* 22 (2002) 261-272.

See also, Stamm, *Sacraments and Discipleship: Understanding Baptism and the Lord's Supper in a United Methodist Context* (Nashville: Discipleship Recourses, 2001) 68-72.

<sup>xix</sup> James Farwell, "Baptism, Eucharist, and the Hospitality of Jesus: On the Practice of 'Open Communion,'" *Anglican Theological Review* 86.2 (2004), 218-20.

<sup>xx</sup> *Hymn* 165, cited from J. Ernest Rattenbury, *The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley* (OSL reprint, Akron: OSL Publications, 1990) 202.

<sup>xxi</sup> See Katherine Tanner's critique of James Farwell on this point: "In Praise of Open Communion: A Rejoinder to James Farwell," *Anglican Theological Review* 86.3 (2004), 480-5.