

History of the Rite of the Distribution of Holy Communion

Abbé Martin Lugmayr¹

I – Preliminary Remarks

The historian may attempt to describe past events, place them within a broader context and elucidate their causes. He can only truly explain or interpret them if he takes a personal interest in a specific field, if he understands the internal relationships specific to that field, and if he can devote himself personally to studying how they unfold.² Someone who has absolutely no interest in politics would find it difficult to write a history of England or France. Anyone who rules out the possibility of miracles cuts themselves off from the history of Israel, that of Our Lord Jesus Christ, or that of the Church. Not as a historian, but as a poor philosopher. What consequences for our subject arise from these reflections? The history of the rite of Communion cannot be considered solely from a historical perspective. Since, on the one hand, there is the Most Holy Sacrament and, on the other, there is man, an understanding of the rite leading to communion with the faithful of the Lord present in the Sacrament must take into account both the mysteries of the Eucharistic faith and the realities dependent on the relationship between God and man, as well as the symbolic expression of this reality.

II – The Testimony of the New Testament

We do not have, in Holy Scripture, a detailed account of the manner in which Communion is to be received. And yet, a few interesting observations can be made.

It has been concluded from Christ's words: 'Take and eat: this is my Body' (Mt 26:26) that 'taking' excluded 'receiving', a point which a subsequent rite was to take into account³. One might respond to this as follows: firstly, Saint Luke emphasises that the Lord gave his body to his disciples (Lk 22:19); secondly, the shortcomings of translations into vernacular languages become

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² 'The word "inter-prelation" puts us on the very trail of this question: every interpretation requires an "inter"—a penetration, an interposition, an accompaniment on the part of the interpreter. Pure objectivity is an absurd abstraction. The non-participant feels nothing; there is knowledge only if there is participation.' J. Ratzinger, 'Schriftauslegung im Widerstreit. Zur Frage nach Grundlagen und Weg der Exegese heute', in *Schriftauslegung im Widerstreit*, ed. by J. Ratzinger, Freiburg im Breisgau, Herder, 1989, p. 23.

³ Indeed, in a letter written in French accompanying the instruction **Memoriale Dei**, the Congregation for Divine Worship authorised the faithful to receive the Body of the Lord directly from the ciborium ('A simpler method may, however, also be adopted, whereby the faithful may receive the Host directly from the sacred vessel', **AAS** 61 [1969], 547). Four years later, on 21 June 1973 to be precise, this possibility was abolished in the communiqué *De sacra Communionem et cultu mysterii Eucharistici extra missam* (cf. EDIL, I, no. 3082).

These meanings become evident when one refers to the original inspired text. The term *lambanein* does indeed mean, etymologically, ‘to take, to seize’, but it can be understood in two ways: one, active, in the sense of ‘to take, to place within the bounds of one’s domain’; the other in the sense of ‘to receive’. This latter meaning occurs in the New Testament chiefly when addressing the relationship between God and man. We are quite simply those who receive^{nt4}. It is theologically inconceivable that a man should seize the body of Christ to place it at his own disposal. This is why one might think that there is a rite capable of satisfying this principle. ‘*Labete*’ must therefore be understood in the sense of ‘receive’^{nt5}. The Hebrew word *lkh*, corresponding to *lambanein*, means ‘to take, to seize, to appropriate’, but also ‘to accept, to receive,

welcome’⁶. This also holds true in another important language, related to that of the Lord, the Syriac language. The term *nsb* there means, by its root, ‘to take’, but often, in its meaning, ‘to receive’, as can be verified from the description of Holy Communion given by Saint Ephrem the Syrianⁿ⁷.

Confirmation of our thesis can be found in the writings of early Christianity. Thus, Origen emphasises that Christ bestows upon us his body and blood: ‘If you go up with him to celebrate the Passover, he offers you the cup of the new covenant just as he offers you the bread of blessing; he offers you his own body and his own blood’⁸. Justin the Martyr, in turn, emphasises that Christ offered his body and blood solely to his apostles: ‘for the apostles, in their writings known as the Gospels, have recorded what was commanded to them: Jesus took the bread, gave thanks and said: ‘Do this in remembrance of me; this is my Body’; and in the same way he took the cup, gave thanks and said: ‘This is my Blood’. And that He offered them only to them alone.’⁹ It also follows from John 13:26 that the Lord placed a piece dipped in something on Judas’s lips (though the passage does not make it clear exactly what it was). It can be concluded from the First Epistle to the Corinthians that all those living in grave sin were excluded from the community of those receiving Holy Communion (1 Cor 5:6–13). Furthermore, so-called ‘secret’ sinners were to abstain from receiving Holy Communion if they did not wish to be guilty towards the Lord’s body (1 Cor 11:27). Such a severe warning—failure to observe which would have brought about punishment from God (cf. 1 Cor 11:30 ff.)—must necessarily have been accompanied by rites which, firstly, allowed one to refrain from receiving communion and, secondly, took into account respect for and the

⁴ Cf. 1 Cor 4:7.

⁵ See Th WBNT, IV, entry on *Lambano* (Delling), 5 ff.

⁶ See H. SEEBASS, Th WBAT, IV, 590.

⁷ See Pierre YOUSSEF, ‘*The Eucharist in Saint Ephrem of Nisibis*’, *Orientalia Christiana analecta*, 224, Rome, 1984, p. 298.

⁸ *Hom. XIX.* in Jer., GCS, Origen, III, 13, p. 169, l. 30 et seq.

⁹ *Apologia*, I, 66.

a sacred reverence to be observed. This is all the more certain given that, as C. F. D. Moule points out, ‘in the New Testament, the only explicit reference to the preparations for the Lord’s Supper is couched in terms of judgement (*judgement*). “ ”¹⁰

III – The Rite of Communion throughout History

3-1 - - The place where communion was administered

The sanctuary was separated from the rest of the church by a grille serving as a partition, the form of which is thought to have varied over the course of history. The clergy received Holy Communion at the altar, whilst the faithful stood before the choir screen^{ur11}. The Council of Laodicea in the 4th century already mentions that laypeople received Communion at the altar, but that women were explicitly forbidden to approach it^{r12}. The distribution of Holy Communion in front of the altar, as a custom that had been in place for some time, is mentioned only in Gaul^{e13}. In the Carolingian period, the norm of the universal Church prevailed here as wellⁱ¹⁴. Later, Holy Communion was sometimes distributed to the laity at a side altar; from the introduction of the jubé¹⁵, it was mostly administered at the altar of the Crucifixion erected in front of the choir^{ui16}. From the 13th century onwards, two acolytes spread a white linen cloth in front of the communicants kneeling before

the altar; in the 16th century, this cloth began to be spread over a sort of bench placed between the presbytery and the rest of the nave, from which our communion table originated.

¹⁰ ‘The only explicit reference in the New Testament to preparation for the Lord’s Supper is in terms of judgement’, C.F.D. Moule, ‘The judgement theme in the sacraments’, in **The Background of the New Testament and its eschatology*. Studies in honour of C. H. Dodd*, Cambridge: University Press, 1956, p. 456.

¹¹ Thus, for example, Augustine warns those who, because they are guilty, have been deprived of the right to communion, ‘so that we may not have to turn them away when they arrive at the gates (*de cancellis*)’, Sermon 392, 5; PL, 39, 1712.

¹² Council of Laodicea, canon 44, Mansi, II, 571.

¹³ Without restriction, at the Synod of Tours (567), in Canon 4 (Mansi, IX, 793): ‘*Let the laity not presume in any way to stand near the altar, where the holy mysteries are celebrated, amongst the clergy, either during vigils or Masses; but let that part which is separated from the altar by the screens be open only to the choirs of chanting clergy. As for praying and receiving Communion, let the holy of holies be open to the laity and women, as is the custom*’. (“Laypeople must under no circumstances presume to stand with the clergy near the altar where the holy mysteries are celebrated during vigils and Masses: but the space between the choir screen and the altar must be open only to the clergy chanting. On the other hand, for prayer and communion, the sanctuary must remain open to laypeople and women, as is customary.”)

¹⁴ In Spain, the Fourth Council of Toledo had already decreed in 633 (Mansi, X, 624): ‘*Ut sacerdos et levita ante altare communicent, in choro clericus, extra chorum populus*’. (‘Let priests and Levites receive Communion at the altar; the clergy in the choir, the congregation outside the choir’).

¹⁵ On its history and significance, see Klaus GAMBER, ‘Die Funktion des gotischen Lettners aufgezeigt am einstigen “Lectorium” des Regensburger Domes’, in *Sancta Sanctorum. Studien zur liturgischen Ausstattung der Kirche, vor allem des Altarraums*, Friedrich Pustet, Regensburg 1981, pp. 109–119.

¹⁶ See J. A. JUNGSMANN, **Missarum sollemnia**, Vol. III, Paris, Aubier, 1958, p. 307.

¹⁷ The reference to a cloth being spread out in front of the communion rail appears for the last time in an instruction dated 26 March 1929 (AAS, 21 [1929] no. 638).

3-2 - The manner of distributing Communion

3-2-1: Historical overview ⁻¹⁸

From the ^{third} century onwards, evidence can be found in various provinces of the Church suggesting that the Lord's Eucharistic Body was distributed into the hands of the laity.

For Alexandria and the Egyptian dioceses, we may cite Clement of Alexandria (d. before 216/ 217)¹⁹ and Dionysius of Alexandria (d. 264/ 265)²⁰; for Palestine, Saint Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 386)²¹. For the Syrian region, texts can be found in the works of Aphrahat (d. shortly after 345)²², Ephrem the Syrian (d. 373)²³, John Chrysostom (d. 407)²⁴ and probably in those of Kyrillona ^{s25}. For the 5th century, one might mention, for example, Theodoret of Cyrus (d. c. 466)²⁶. Among the Cappadocians, we might cite Basil the Great (d. 379)²⁷ and Gregory of Nazianzus (d. 390)²⁸. In the East, later accounts can be found in the works of Anastasius Sinaita (d. shortly after 700)²⁹ and John of Damascus (d. c. 750)³⁰. In North Africa, the custom is attested to ^{e31} Tertullian (c. after 220)³², Cyprian (c. 258)³³, Augustine (c. 430)³⁴ in two polemical works ³⁵ and Quodvultdeus (c. 453)³⁶. In Rome and Italy, there are

¹⁸ A valuable overview of the subject can be found in Otto NUßBAUM, **Die Handkommunion**, Cologne: J. P. Bachem, 1969, pp. 9 ff.

¹⁹ *Strom.* 1, 1, 5 (GCS Clem. 2, 18 ff. Stählin).

²⁰ *Eusebius*, H. E. 7, 9, 4; GCS Euseb. 2, 2, 648.

²¹ *Cat. myst.*, 5, 21; FC 7, 162.

²² *Hom.* 7, 21 and 20, 8.

²³ *Hymns of Fide*, 10, 8; 10, 15 CSCO 154/155; Seq II,2, cf. *Naqpayata* (= Supplement to the Chaldean Mysteries), Mosul 1901.

²⁴ Homily on Matthew 82, 4 (PG 58, 743); Homily on 'Vidi Dominum', 6, 3 (PG 56, 138 ff.).

²⁵ Song of supplication for All Saints' Day in the Holy Year 396 concerning the plague of locusts, BKV 6, 14: 'With a single word Your will created us and I gave birth; with a single drop of Your grace, heal my children and drive away my pains! If the woman with the haemorrhage who grasped Your garments was healed by Your cloak, how much more shall I receive help and salvation, I who have grasped Your whole body!' In my view, one cannot conclude with absolute certainty that this refers to communion in the hand, as the speaker is not an individual but the Church of the city of Constantinople, once again threatened with divine punishment following the invasion of the Huns.

²⁶ in *Song of Songs* 1:2 (PG 81, 53).

²⁷ Ep. 93, PG 32, 484 ff.

²⁸ **Adv. mulieres** 299 ff., PG 37, 906.

²⁹ *Oratio de S. Synaxi*, PG 89, 832.

³⁰ **De fide** 4, 13; PG 94, 1149.

³¹ A passage from the Passion of Saint Perpetua 4, 9, cited by NUßBAUM, is, in my view, too unclear to be cited as evidence (it concerns a vision relating to her future martyrdom).

³² **De idol.** 7, 1; CCSL 2, 1106.

³³ *Ep.* 58, 9; CSEL 3, 2, 665; *De lapsis* 22, CSEL 3, 1, 253 ff.; *De lapsis* 26, CSEL 3, 13, 256.

³⁴ Cf. Wunibald ROETZER, **The Writings of Saint Augustine as a Source for the History of the Liturgy**, Munich, 1930, pp. 131–135.

³⁵ *Contra ep. Parm.* 2, 7, 13, CSEL 51, 58; *Contra lit. Petil.* 2, 23, 53, CSEL 52, 51 ff.

³⁶ **De Tempore barbarico**, II, IV, 1–2; CCSL 60, 475.

even Pope Cornelius (251–253) in a letter transmitted by Eusebius ^{be37}, Ambrose (d. 397)³⁸ in his description of man after his crea^{on39}, Gaudentius of Brescia (d. after 406)⁴⁰, Peter Chrysologus (d. 450)^{40 41} and Cassiodorus (d. c. 580)⁴². In Spain, one finds corresponding texts corresponding texts in the acts of the synods of Zaragoza (380)⁴³ and Toledo (400)⁴⁴. In Gaul, Caesarius of Arles (d. 542)⁴⁵ mentions this method of distributing communion in his sermons ^{on46}. The Venerable Bede (d. 753) attests to it in England ^{re47}. After 800, this manner of receiving communion is attested only as a privilege of the clergy ^{gé48}. Owing to the risk of desecration by Jews and heretics, the Synod of Córdoba, in 839, rejected the Cassianists' claim to receive Holy Communion in the hand *more levitarum* ⁴⁹. Reginon of P^{rüm50}, in his work **De Synodalibus causis** composed around 906 ⁵¹, attributed the following canon concerning the duties of the priest to a synod of Rouen: 'Let him place [Communion] neither in the hand of a layperson nor in that of a woman, but only upon the lips, whilst uttering the following words: *May the Body and Blood of the Lord contribute to the forgiveness of your sins and lead you to eternal life*. If anyone contravenes this prescription, let him be excluded from the altar, since he despises the Almighty and refuses to honour Him ^{r52}. ' As the existence of the said synod remains disputed to this day ^{e 53}, we may accept this text as an important canonical testimony, given that such a threat of punishment implies that the opposite—that is, communion on the lips—was the norm.

³⁷ *Hist. Eccl.*, VI, 43, 18.

³⁸ For a more detailed description of the Holy Mass in Milan, see Josef SCHMITZ, *Gottesdienst im altchristlichen Mailand*, Peter Hanstein Verlag, Cologne-Bonn, 1975.

³⁹ *Exameron* VI, 9, 69; CSEL 32, 257.

⁴⁰ *Tract. Paschal.* 2 in Ex 31; CSEL 68, 31.

⁴¹ Sermo 33, *PL* 52, 295 ff.; Sermo 34, *PL* 52, 297.

⁴² *Hist. Eccl.* 9, 30; *PL* 69, 1145.

⁴³ Can. 3; Mansi 3, 634.

⁴⁴ Can. 14; Mansi 3, 1000.

⁴⁵ Cf. Karl BERG, *Cäsarius of Arles. A Sixth-Century Bishop Sheds Light on the Liturgical Life of His Time* (Dissertatio ad lauream in facultate theologica pontificae universitatis Gregorianae Urbis, Romae 1935/1944/1946), Salzburg, Kulturverlag, 1994.

⁴⁶ Sermo 44, 6, CCSL 103, 199; Sermo 227, 5, CCSL 104, 899 ff.

⁴⁷ **De Tabernaculo et vasis eius**, Book III, Chapter 14; *PL* 91, 498.

⁴⁸ Cf. NUßBAUM, **Die Handkommunion**, op. cit., 25.

⁴⁹ Cf. C.J. HEFELE, **Conciliengeschichte**, vol. IV, 2nd ed., Freiburg, 1879, p. 99.

⁵⁰ On his work on canon law, see Paul FOURNIER, 'L'œuvre canonique de Reginon de Prüm', in *Mélanges de droit canonique*, vol. II, Aalen, Scientia Verlag, 1983, p. 333 ff.

⁵¹ Edited by F.G.A. Wasserschleben, Leipzig, 1840.

⁵² 'Let no layman or woman receive the Eucharist in their hands, but let it be placed only in their mouth with these words: "May the Body and Blood of the Lord be for your remission and for eternal life." 'If anyone has transgressed these rules, because they have despised the almighty God and, as far as they are able, dishonoured him, let them be removed from the altar', Mansi 10, 1199 ff.

⁵³ 'It has not yet been clarified to this day whether and when this council was held', Odette PONTAL, **Die Synoden im Merowingerreich**, Paderborn, Schöningh, 1986, p. 204. This synod is dated either to 650 or to 688/89.

This is also given as the only authorised version in the *Missa illyric*^{a54} and in the
ne⁵⁵. However, evidence of it can already be found in the writings of Gregory the Great (c. 604)⁵⁶ and in
accounts relating to the sick. In the 6th century, according to Mario Righetti, communion on the lips
seems to have already been more widespread than was previously believ^{s57}. According to Klaus Gamber,
the abolition of communion in the hand dates back to the 5th/6th century⁵⁸. Of course, the latter was
impossible wherever Holy Communion was administered by intinction (by dipping into the Precious
Blood), a custom which, although rejected by the Synod of Braga in 675 p.⁵⁹, was subsequently used
more frequently, initially for the communion of the sick p.⁶⁰, until it eventually found wider acceptance
in parishes. At the same time, the distribution of Communion in the East was carried out both by
intinction and with a spoon.

Jean d'Avranches (d. 1079) emphasises that the priest was not permitted to receive Communion
by intinction, but that the laity were authorised to do so 'not by virtue of an act of authority, but because
of the great distress caused by the fear of seeing the blood of Christ spilled'.⁶¹ However, to ensure that
not a single drop of the Precious Blood fell to the ground whilst the priest was carrying Holy
Communion to

⁵⁴ *Missa Illyrica*, PL 138, 1333.

⁵⁵ It is true that the emperor received Holy Communion in his hand, but this does not, nevertheless, constitute an exception, as he was a member of the clergy.

⁵⁶ Pope Gregory recounts, regarding the healing of a deaf man by Pope Agapitus I (535–536), that the latter had first freed the sick man from his paralysis: 'And when he placed the Lord's Body in his mouth, that tongue, long silent, was loosed to speak. *Mirati omnes flere prae gaudio coeperunt, eorumque mentes illico metus et reverentia inva-sit, cum videlicet cernerent quid Agapitus facere in virtute Domini ex adiutorio Petri potuisset*' ('And when he had placed the Lord's body in his mouth, his tongue, long bound, was loosed and he spoke. All were filled with wonder and began to weep for joy, and they were seized within by fear and reverence, having recognised what Agapitus was able to do with Peter's help, by the power of the Lord'), *Dial.*, Book III; PL 77, 224.

⁵⁷ Cf. **Manuale di Storia Liturgica**, III, Milan, Ancora, 1966, 516.

⁵⁸ Klaus GAMBER, **Ritus Modernus**, **Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Liturgiereform**, Regensburg, F. Pustet, 1972, p. 30.

⁵⁹ 'As for the practice of offering the Eucharist to the people, dipped in wine, as a complement to communion, this is not attested in the Gospel

Gospel, where he entrusted his body and blood to the apostles; for the consecration of the bread and the chalice is mentioned separately.' ('As to whether, for communion to be complete, one should use a host dipped in the Precious Blood, it may be said that no confirmation of this is to be found in the testimony provided by the Gospels. When the Lord entrusted his body and blood to his apostles, it is in fact stated that he gave the bread (transformed into his body) and the chalice separately'), Mansi XI, 155.

⁶⁰ Towards the end of the 10th century, a passage is found in Burchard of Worms (d. 1025) which prescribes the preservation of consecrated hosts that have previously been dipped in the Precious Blood – specifically for the communion of the sick: 'Let every priest have a pyx, or a vessel worthy of such a sacred mystery, in which the Body of the Lord may be carefully preserved for those departing this world. This sacred offering must be dipped in the Blood of Christ, so that the priest may truly say to the sick: "May the Body and Blood of the Lord be of benefit to you", etc. And it must always be kept under lock and key on the altar to protect it from mice and wicked men, and must be changed every seven days; that is to say, the priest must remove it and replace it with another, consecrated on the same day, lest, if kept for too long, it should become mouldy, God forbid.' ('Every priest shall use a pyx or a vessel worthy of such a great sacrament, in which the Body of the Lord is carefully preserved as viaticum for the dying. But this holy offering must have been dipped in the Blood of Christ so that the priest may truly say to the sick person: 'May the Body and Blood of the Lord be of benefit, etc.' Let it always be kept locked above the altar, to protect it from mice and ungodly men, and let it be consumed by the priest every seven days and replaced by another consecrated on the same day, so that it does not become mouldy as a result of being kept for too long, God forbid'), *Decretorum liber quintus*, PL 140, 754.

⁶¹ *The Book of John of Abrincensis, Bishop*: 'On ecclesiastical offices: if, however, there is no need (for viaticum), the third (portion of the host) shall be received by one of the ministers. 'Not with the bread dipped, but in accordance with the definition of the Council of Toledo—the Body separately, the Blood separately—shall the priest receive Communion, except for the people, who are permitted to receive Communion with the bread dipped, not by authority, but out of the utmost necessity arising from fear of the shedding of Christ's blood', PL 147, 37.

A cloth was held beneath the communicant's chin, p. 62. At Cluny, a flat gold cup was used for this purpose, which an acolyte held beneath the priest's hand when the latter had dipped the fragment of the host into the chalice—held by the subdeacon—and placed it upon the lips of the communicant⁶³. This liturgical object may be seen as an early form of our communion paten.

Until the 12th century, the Precious Blood was also distributed to the laity (apart from cases of communion by intinction). The solemn administration was the responsibility of the deacon. Either a consecration chalice or a special distribution chalice was used (the latter is still in use amongst the Ethiopians and Eastern Syrians). However, for specific reasons, we must now consider the rite of distribution of the first type in greater detail.

3-2-2: The rite of the distribution of the Body of the Lord

For over 1,000 years, neither in the West nor in the East was Communion given in the hand. Things changed with the 1969 instruction **Memoriale Domini**⁶⁴. A stubborn disobedience, particularly in the Netherlands, proved to be successful. Rome authorised what came to be known as 'Communion in the hand' (, no. 65). Initially conceived as a concession for a few countries – with the traditional form remaining the norm for the universal Church – Communion in the hand began a formidable triumphal march across the Latin-rite countries. Those who advocated it claimed, and still claim, that it was merely a matter of reviving an ancient practice. Let us examine this assertion.

Apart from Holy Communion, the faithful worshipped the Lord with the deepest reverence. Saint Augustine teaches: “ Because he took on this flesh and gave it to us as food, and because no one eats this flesh without first having adored it, we may deduce to what extent this footstool of the Lord's feet must be adored^{ur 66}, and that not only do we not sin when we adore it, but we sin when we do not adore it^{ur 67}. ” Saint Cyril of Jerusalem says, with regard to receiving the Precious Blood, that one should receive Communion ‘whilst saying “*Amen*”, in an attitude of adoration and respect’. (Cat. myst., 5,

⁶² In the Coptic liturgy, each communicant holds beneath their chin a pallium which they receive from a minister.

⁶³ Cf. Udalrici, *Consuet. Clun.* II, 30; PL 149, 721.

⁶⁴ AAS 61 [1969], 541–545.

⁶⁵ Some examples in MAY, *Mund-oder Handkommunion*, op. cit., p. 75 ff.

⁶⁶ Saint Augustine applies Psalm 99:5 (*‘Et adorate scabellum pedum eius’*: ‘And bow down before the footstool of his feet’) to the body of Christ.

⁶⁷ *‘And since he walked here in that very flesh, and gave us that very flesh to eat for our salvation; yet no one eats that flesh unless they have first worshipped it; it has been established how such a footstool of the Lord is to be worshipped, and not only do we not sin by worshipping it, but we sin by failing to worship it’*, *Enarr. in Ps.* 98, 9; CSEL 39, 1385.

If one was some distance from the place where Communion was being distributed, one would raise one's hands

towards the sky ¹⁶⁹ and then placed one on top of the other ⁷⁰. The faithful were not permitted to bring any other vessel to receive the Lord's Body; only hands arranged in the shape of a cross were allowed ⁷¹. However, the Church Fathers never tire of reminding us that we must not show disrespect and that we ought to reflect on God's condescension. Saint John Chrysostom preached as follows: 'And how marvellous it is that you stand alongside the seraphim, God having permitted you to touch freely that which the seraphim dare not touch?' 'But one of the seraphim flew towards me,' we read, 'and he held in his hand a burning coal which he had taken from the altar with tongs' (Isaiah 6:6). That altar is the type and image of this altar; that fire is an image of this spiritual fire. Yet the seraphim did not dare to use their hands (*apsastai*), but only a pair of tongs, whilst you receive it (*lambaneis*) in your hand. But if you now consider the dignity of the present gifts, these are of far greater value than what the seraphim took up ^{nt 72}". The hands had to be free from all sin. Tertullian recounts some deplorable facts: 'The zealous believer can only weep at the following facts: can one imagine a Christian leaving the idols to come to church; going from the workshop of monsters to the house of God and raising to God the Father the hands with which he has fashioned idols; worshipping with the hands that outside are raised against God; directing towards the body of the Lord the hands that give form to demons? Even that is not enough. It is not enough that they receive from other hands what they subsequently defile; those very same hands also give to others what they have defiled. Idol-makers are called upon to serve the Church. What a crime! The Jews laid their hands on Christ but once, yet these hands sin daily against his body. These hands

⁶⁸ Let us cite a few examples of worship from the subsequent period, prior to the reception of Holy Communion: in the Rule of Saint Columbanus (c. 615), a triple bow is prescribed; elsewhere, the ground is kissed; the *Consuetudines* of Cluny, recorded around 1080, require a genuflection. See JUNGSMANN, *Missarum Sollemnia*, III, op. cit., 458.

⁶⁹ See, on this subject, *The Communion of the Apostles* of Russano, dating from the 6th century.

⁷⁰ Saint Augustine, for example, speaks as follows in **Contra ep. Parm.* 2, 7, 13, CSEL 51, 58, of the *'*Manibus coniunctis*'*, the hands clasped together: 'But in the meantime, let us consider whether Optatus at least had some blemish or some fault; they are not so blind as to claim that his life was entirely spotless and free from all fault. Why, then, should he be permitted to offer gifts to God, whilst the others received from him with joined hands what he, being tainted and flawed, had presented?' ("But let them take care that Optatus, at the very least, was not tainted and had not committed a fault, for they are not so blind as to be able to claim that his life had been pure of all taint and free from all fault. Consequently, why did he step forward to offer sacrifices to God, and why did they receive from him, with their hands clasped together, what he had offered—which was defiled and tainted?").*

⁷¹ Cf. the Second Synod in Trullo (692), canon 101, Mansi 11, 985 ff.: If anyone wishes to receive Holy Communion, 'let him form his hands into the shape of a cross and step forward to receive the grace-filled communion. But we do not admit those who, instead of their hands, bring a vessel of gold or any other material, in which to receive the immaculate communion, for they prefer inanimate matter subject to human control to the image of God'. The Second Council in Trullo was not recognised by Pope Sergius, as it had proclaimed certain anti-Roman canons; John VIII accepted these decisions insofar as they did not contradict the teaching and practice of Rome. (Cf. K. BAUS, *LTHK2*, 10, 381 ff.)

⁷² In illud: *Vidi Dominum*, hom. 6,3; PG 56, 138 ff.

should be cut off! Consider now what was said only by way of comparison: if your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. How much more should the hands be cut off by which scandal reaches the body of the Lord ⁷³? ' And Gregory of Nazianzus writes against women who adorn themselves for the sake of seduction: 'Are your hands not appalled to see themselves stretched out towards the mystical food, when they have served to paint [upon your face] a deplorable beaut ^{e 74}?'

Later texts mention the prior washing of hands and the placing of a cloth over women's hands; thus, Saint Caesarius of Arles: 'What I have to say to you in conclusion is neither difficult nor tiring. I am speaking of what I often see you doing. All men wash their hands when they wish to receive Communion, and all women hold out small, clean linen cloths upon which they receive the Body of the Lord. What I wish to tell you, my brothers, is not difficult

: just as men wash their hands with water, so too must they purify their consciences through almsgiving; and just as women hold out a small, clean linen cloth, so must they offer a chaste body and a pure heart, so as to receive the sacrament of Christ with a clear conscience. My brothers, would anyone place their robe in a dirty chest? And if one does not place a precious robe there, what audacity is there in receiving the Eucharist of Christ in a soul stained by the mire of sin ^{!75}. In another sermon, he declares: 'If we blush and fear to receive the Eucharist with unclean hands, how much more must we fear to receive this same Eucharist with a soul ^{stained} ' ⁷⁶. The Synod of Auxerre strictly prescribed that women's hands should be covered: 'It is not permitted for women to receive the Eucharist with uncovered hands ' ⁷⁷. ' Eventually, men's hands were also covered, as can be demonstrated by

⁷³ *De idolatria*, ch. 7, CCSL 2, 1106: 'On this point, the zeal of the faith will argue vehemently: is it right for a Christian to come from idols into the church, to come from the workshop of the enemy into the house of God, for the mothers of idols to raise their hands to God the Father, to worship with these hands which are worshipped outside against God, and to bring those hands—which bestow bodies upon demons—to the body of the Lord? Nor is this enough. It would be bad enough if they were merely to receive from other hands that which defiles them, but they themselves also pass on to others that which they have defiled. Idol-makers are admitted into the ecclesiastical order. What a crime! Once the Jews laid their hands upon Christ; these men daily assault His body. O hands that ought to be cut off! Let them now consider whether this was said by way of analogy: 'If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off.' Which hands are more deserving of being cut off than those in which the Lord's body is defiled?'

⁷⁴ *Against Women* 299f., PG 37,906.

⁷⁵ Sermon 227, 5, CCSL 104, 899f.: 'Finally, dearest brothers, what I suggest is neither serious nor burdensome: I say this because I see you doing it frequently. All men, when they wish to receive Communion, wash their hands, and all women present clean cloths upon which to receive the Body of Christ. What I say is not a heavy burden, brothers: just as men wash their hands with water, so let them wash their consciences with alms; likewise, just as women present a clean cloth upon which to receive the Body of Christ, so let them present a chaste body and a pure heart, that they may receive the sacraments of Christ with a clear conscience. I ask you, brothers, is there anyone who would wish to place his garment in a chest full of filth? And if a precious garment is not placed in a chest full of filth, with what face is the Eucharist of Christ received in a soul defiled by the filth of sin?

⁷⁶ 'And if we blush and fear to touch the Eucharist with unclean hands, we ought to fear all the more to receive the Eucharist itself whilst our soul is defiled within', Sermon 44, 6.

⁷⁷ Synod of Auxerre (between 561 and 605), canon 36: 'It is not lawful for a woman to receive the Eucharist with her bare hand', Mansi 9, 91.

figurative depictions ^{s78} and the engravings of silver patens ^{nt79}. It is also worth noting that, from 350 onwards, scenes depicting the ‘multiplication of the loaves’ followed this same principle. One can see here the influence of the liturgy ^{e80}. Let us now consider more closely the hand upon which Holy Communion was placed. In his final mystagogical catechesis ^{que81}, delivered during the Easter season towards the end of his life (he died in 387), Saint Cyril of Jerusalem teaches the newly baptised how one ought to receive the Holy Sacrament: ‘When, then, you approach [to receive Communion], do not hold out your palms with your hands spread wide, nor with your fingers splayed; but make your left hand a throne for your right hand, since the latter is to receive the King, and, in the palm of your hand, receive the Body of Christ, saying: “Amen”. Then, with care, sanctify your eyes by the touch of the holy Body, then take it and take care not to lose any of it. For whatever you lose is as though you were losing one of your own limbs. Tell me, indeed, if you were given gold flakes, would you not hold on to them with the utmost care, taking care not to lose any of them or let them come to any harm? Will you not, then, watch over with far greater care an object more precious than gold and precious stones, so as not to lose a single crumb of it ?⁸²’ At first glance, one might think this describes the current practice of receiving Communion in the hand; but on closer inspection, a fundamental difference is immediately apparent. Thus, the right hand was to be placed above the left, and not the other way round as is the case today. A minor detail? Not at all. For back then, as today, most men were right-handed, and no one would have thought of receiving or taking a precious gift with their left hand ^{he83}. According to the description by Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, it was impossible for a worshipper to grasp the Lord’s body and bring it to their mouth. Otto Nußbaum reaches the same conclusion: ‘But above all, it is

⁷⁸ E.g. **The Communion of the Apostles** from the 6th-century Rossano Codex.

⁷⁹ On the paten by Dum. Oaks, one can clearly see the apostles receiving communion, their hands covered with a cloth (Fig. in LCI, I, 174 ff.).

⁸⁰ Dom Gabriel M. BRASO, ‘La Velacio de la mans. Recul d’un tema d’archeologie chrétienne’, in *Liturgica I, Cardinali I. A. Schuster in memoriam*, Montserrat, 1956, pp. 311–386, provides a detailed study of the theme of covered hands.

⁸¹ Tradition has attributed the five mystagogical catecheses of Jerusalem to Saint Cyril. It was only following the study by W. J. SWAAN (1942) were they attributed to Cyril’s successor, John of Jerusalem. The oldest manuscript, the *Codex Monacensis* 394, dating from the 10th century, does indeed name John as the author: in a manuscript of almost equal antiquity, the *Ottobonianus* 86, Cyril’s name is found added by another hand to that of John. However, we have other manuscripts—the *Coisilianus* 227 (11th century?), *Marcianus* II, 35 (13th century?) and *Ottobonianus* 220 (16th/17th century)—which name Cyril as the author. Other objections of a liturgical and theological nature are not convincing, according to Auguste PIEDAGNEL (see SG 120, 33 ff.). The differences between the 18 catecheses and the mystagogical catecheses can be explained by the discipline of the Arcane and by subsequent theological development. Even if John had revised them somewhat, one could not dispute that they are by Cyril. In any case, they bear witness to the liturgical practices in use towards the end of the 4th century.

⁸² *Myst. Cat.* 5, 21. The Greek text can be found in a critical edition, e.g. in the **Fontes Christiani**, vol. VII, p. 162. (The German translation in this paper follows, whilst always taking the original text into account, both the German version by RÖWEKAMP [in the cited volume of the FC] and that by F.J. DÖLGER, which he had published in **Antike und Christentum**, vol. III, Münster in Westphalia, Aschendorff 1932, 235 ff.). French translation based on JUNG-MANN, *Missarum Sollemnia*, III, 311 (Translator’s note).

⁸³ On the preference given to the right hand in antiquity and in Holy Scripture, see Th WBNT, II, 37 ff. and IX, 415.

In my view, it is inconceivable – given the strong preference for the right hand in antiquity, and likewise in the Church’s liturgy – that it should have been precisely the left hand, regarded as inferior, as a symbol of evil, and consequently also as unsuitable for worship and incapable of performing it, which would have been permitted to touch the Eucharistic bread and place it upon the lips. In my view, the sacred bread was taken directly into the mouth using the right hand. The kiss given to this food before consuming it, and above all the comparison of this kiss with the act of licking the Lord, support this conclusion.⁸⁴ The right hand thus served, as it were, as a communion paten, from which the Body of Christ and any fragments were taken with the mouth, whilst the communicant bowed deeply. We shall return to Nußbaum’s argument just cited, as some have claimed that the mention of a custom as unusual as the sanctification of the eyes, as reported by Cyril, was introduced into the text by John of Jerusalem, Cyril’s successor. However, it can be proven that this was a widespread custom in Cyril’s time. In his treatise on humility, completed no later than 337 AD, Aphrahat goes on to speak, in an admonition, of certain communion rites: ‘Your tongue must love silence, since it licks the wounds of the Lord. Let your lips guard against opening, since with them you give a kiss to the Son of the King’,⁸⁵ He speaks of licking with the tongue in a commentary on Jude 7, ,⁸⁶. In Instruction 20, 8, Aphrahat also speaks of the sanctification of the eyes: ‘The poor man at the gate represents Our Saviour (cf. Lk 16:20 ff.). He begged him to give him the fruits [those of his people] so that he might give them to the one who had sent him. But no one gave him any (cf. Mk 12:2, 6). It is said that the dogs came and licked his wounds (cf. Matt 7:6; 15:26 ff.). The dogs that came were in fact the peoples who licked the wounds of Our Saviour (cf. Matt 7:6; 15:26 ff.). They take his body and place it upon their eyes. ‘. ⁸⁷ A text whose wording bears a to the formulations of Saint Cyril is found in the works of Saint John Chrysostom,

⁸⁴ Otto NUßBAUM, **Die Handkommunion**, op. cit., p. 18 ff.

⁸⁵ APHRAATE, *Unterweisungen*, 9, 10; translated and introduced by Peter BRUNS, FC 5/1, 265.

⁸⁶ In Introduction 7, 21, he speaks of those whom Gideon, on God’s command, was to choose: ‘Whoever laps up the water as a dog does shall go into battle’ (Judges 7:5): ‘Of all the animals created at the same time as man, none loves its master as much as the dog, which keeps watch day and night. Even when it is beaten by its master, it does not leave him. And when it goes hunting with its master and a mighty lion appears before them, it risks death for its master. Just as brave are those who have been rescued from the water. They follow their master like dogs, give themselves up to death for him and fight his battle boldly. They keep watch day and night and bark like dogs when they meditate on the law day and night (Ps 1:2). They love Our Lord and lick His wounds with their tongues, just as a dog licks its master. But those who do not meditate on the Law are called ‘dumb dogs’, for they are unable to bark; those who do not fast with zeal are called ‘voracious dogs’, for they are insatiable’ (Isaiah 56:10 ff.), FC 5/1, 229 ff.

⁸⁷ APHRAAT, *Unterweisungen*, 20, 8; FC 5/2, p. 465.

without being able to be attributed to the latter with certainty⁸⁸. As F.G. Dölger rightly observes, Cyril Chrysostom and Aphrahat complement one another, the latter moreover making special mention of the sanctification of the lips and the tongue, which was certainly implied by the former⁸⁹. Theodoret of Cyrus, moreover, speaks of the kiss given to the body of the Lord⁹⁰. How might one visualise this act involving the senses? As we have already said, the Lord's body was certainly not grasped with the left hand. A text by Saint John of Damascus may help us: 'We approach him filled with a burning desire and with our hands arranged in the form of a cross. And, having rested our eyes, lips and forehead upon it, we partake (*metabolomen*) of the divine coal, so that the fire of our desire, further stoked by the fire of the coal, may consume our sins, enlighten our hearts, and that we may be wholly set ablaze and deified through our participation in the divine fire', no. 91⁹¹. And so, with our heads bowed in adoration, the ceremony took place. Of course, particular care had to be taken to ensure that, during this application to the sense organs, not a single particle was lost. Because of this risk and, as one might imagine, also because of inappropriate and superstitious abuses, this custom disappeared⁹². For it was surely not without reason that the Council of Toledo enacted the following canon in 400: 'If anyone does not consume the Eucharist received from the priest, they shall be rejected as a sacrilegious person'.⁹³ In summary, we may say that the right hand was used not for grasping, but served, as it were, as a communion paten, from which the Body of the Lord was taken with the mouth. But even later, after the blessing of the senses had been abolished, it was relatively easy, if Communion was administered by placing the host in the hand, to walk away with the Lord's Body. Thus, the canons of James of Edessa, drawn up towards the end of the 7th century, record a question put to

⁸⁸ 'When you step forward, do not do so with outstretched arms, but place your left hand as a throne for your right, the latter cupped – as it were, prepared to receive the King. Receive the Body of Christ with great reverence, so that no morsel may fall from your hand or come to harm from any of your limbs. Likewise, approach the chalice without raising your hands in the air, whilst saying 'Amen'. Whilst there is still a little moisture on your lips, let your hands touch your eyes and your forehead: and in this way, your other senses will also be sanctified. And give thanks to God who has honoured you with such a great mystery', *Ecloga* 47, PG 63, 898.

⁸⁹ F.J. DÖLGER, 'Das Segnen der Sinne mit der Eucharistie', in **Antike und Christentum**, vol. III, Münster in Westphalia, Aschendorf, 1932, pp. 231–244, here p. 237. The article also contains other accounts relating to the blessing of the sense organs.

⁹⁰ In Song of Songs 1:2 (PG 81, 53). Regarding the passage **Osculetur me osculis suis**: 'But lest any base, earthly thought be stirred up by what is said of the kisses, let us bear in mind that it is mystically (*en tô mustikô kairô*) that we welcome, kiss, embrace and hold the limbs of the Bridegroom close to our hearts. There is, as it were, a nuptial embrace here: we believe ourselves to be wholly his. We embrace him and shower him with kisses, and, according to Scripture, love drives out fear'.

⁹¹ John of Damascus, *De Fide*, 4, 13; PG 94, 1149.

⁹² 'A custom widespread in Germany since the 14th century recalls the blessing of the eyes with the Eucharist, which was practised a thousand years earlier: after washing one's fingers, one would bring them to one's eyes, saying: '*Lutum fecit Dominus ex sputo et linivit oculos meos et abii et vidi et credidi Deo*' (John 9:11), a custom which could easily have descended into superstition and indecency, and which subsequently disappeared", JUNGSMANN, **Missarum Sollemnia**, III, 312. John of Damascus, **De Fide**, 4, 13; PG 94, 1149.

⁹³ '*Si quis autem acceptam a sacerdote Eucharistiam non sumpserit, velut sacrilegus propellatur*', Can. 14; Mansi 3, 1000.

James, through the priest Addai Philimon⁹⁴: ‘Since there are people who take fragments of the sacrament, and even sew them together into a sort of magic ribbon which they attach to a pouch or hang round their necks as an amulet, or place in their beds or within the walls of their houses, I would like to know whether it is proper to do these things, and, if it is not proper, what punishment should be meted out to those who act in this way?’ This was the reply:

‘But those who commit such an outrage against the sacraments worthy of adoration—the Body and Blood of Christ our God—by regarding them merely as ordinary objects, [merely] worthy of respect in the eyes of Christians, by hanging them round their necks alongside a cross or the relics of saints and consecrated objects, or by placing them in their beds or within the walls of their houses, or in vineyards or gardens or parks, or generally using them as protection for material things, and who do not consider that these sacraments are food for the soul for those who bear the sign of the cross of Christ, and that these sacraments are the leaven and the pledge of the resurrection of the dead and of eternal life: such persons, if they are clerics, shall be removed from office and excluded for three years from the Eucharistic community, and shall take their place amongst the penitents. But if they are laypeople, they shall be excluded from the Eucharistic community for four years and shall take their place amongst the penitents.’⁹⁵ Let us once again pay attention to what Saint Cyril of Jerusalem says, for, alongside his detailed description of the rite of communion, we find an urgent exhortation to take care of even the smallest fragments—even those the size of tiny breadcrumbs—so that they are not lost. They are more precious than gold and precious stones. What faith in the Real Presence! Cyril is not the only witness we can cite. Some 150 years before Cyril, Tertullian (160–220) wrote in his work **On the Soldiers’ Crown**:

‘We also receive [...] the sacrament of the Eucharist in our assemblies, early in the morning, and from the hand of none other than the presiders [that is to say, priests and bishops]... [] This, too, gives rise to our fear when something from our chalice or our bread falls to the ground’. (De Cor. Mil. 3, 4)⁹⁶. Origen (185–254), who moreover often emphasises spiritual interpretations⁹⁷, describes the attitude of the faithful towards the Holy Sacrament as follows: ‘You know, you who are accustomed to participating in the divine mysteries, how, when you receive the Lord’s body, you must be attentive with the utmost care and respect to ensure that not even the smallest crumb falls to the ground, that nothing of the consecrated offering is spilled. You consider it a sin if anything

⁹⁴ Born around 633, died in 708 at the monastery of Tel’ eda. Despite his Monophysite views, he was a highly regarded Syrian writer.

⁹⁵ C. KAYSER, **Die Canones Jacob’s von Edessa** (Leipzig 1886), pp. 13, 14; quoted in F. J. DÖLGER, **Die Eucharistie als Reiseschutz**. *Die Eucharistie in den Händen der Laien, Antike und Christentum*, Vol. 5, 2nd ed., Münster, Aschendorff, 1974, p. 241.

⁹⁶ From **De Corona militum** c. 3, CCSL 2, 1043: ‘The sacrament of the Eucharist (...) we did not receive even at dawn services, nor from the hands of anyone other than the presiding ministers. (...) We anxiously endured even some of our own chalice or bread falling to the ground.’

⁹⁷ Cf. Werner SCHÜTZ, **Der christliche Gottesdienst bei Origenes**, Stuttgart, Calwer Verlag, 1984, pp. 156–172.

‘falls to the ground through negligence. This belief of yours is good’ (In Ex. hom. 13, p. 3)⁹⁸. It is a matter of ‘the smallest crumb’ which must not fall to the ground. Negligence in this matter is a sin. Could one find more precise words?

IV – Summary

There was no rite of Communion in the hand as practised today. Strictly speaking, the texts of the Fathers discussed above do not refer to Communion in the hand, but rather to Communion on the lips, where the right hand serves as a paten. This observation is reinforced by the rite of Communion administered by the deacon in the Byzantine liturgy: bowing deeply, he takes the Body of the Lord with his right hand to his mouth. The reverent reception of the Body of the Lord with the mouth, whilst bowing, clearly shows that here it is the person who receives, and not the one who serves himself and bestows a gift upon himself. This was observed even in the case of Communion in the hand, when it was temporarily authorised⁹⁹. Cardinal Ratzinger once wrote some fundamental remarks on the nature of the sacramental encounter between the creature and the infinite God who reveals himself here: ‘And this is precisely why it is also part of the essential form of the sacrament that it be received, and that no one may administer it to themselves. No one can baptise themselves, confer priestly ordination upon themselves, or absolve themselves of their sins. It is due to this structure of encounter that perfect contrition cannot, by its very nature, remain purely internal, but requires the form of encounter that is the sacrament. This is why passing the Eucharist from one person to another and taking it oneself is not only a contravention of ecclesiastical prescriptions, but also an infringement of the most intimate structure of the sacrament. That the priest has the right, for this sacrament alone, to confer the sacred gift upon himself, stems from *the mysterium tremendum* to which he is

⁹⁸ PG 12, 391; SC 321, p. 384, pp. 69–72.

⁹⁹ St BASIL THE GREAT, Ep. 93, PG 32, and 484 ff: ‘We receive Communion four times a week: on the Lord’s Day, on the fourth day, on Friday and on Saturday, and also on other days when a saint is commemorated. But the fact that, during times of persecution, someone, in the absence of a priest or deacon, might be compelled to receive communion from their own hand presents no cause for concern whatsoever. Indeed, it is superfluous to demonstrate this. For a long-standing custom confirms it in various ways. All hermits, indeed, keep the Eucharist in their homes and, in the absence of a priest, administer it to themselves. In Alexandria and indeed throughout Egypt, every member of the laity (*‘ekastos kai tôn en laô telointon*) usually keeps the Eucharist at home and, whenever he wishes, administers Communion to himself. Indeed, once the priest’s sacrifice has been performed and the offering distributed, the one who first received it in its entirety and then partakes of it daily must be entitled to believe that he is participating in it and receiving it from the one who gave it to him. For in church too the priest distributes a fragment, and the person receiving it holds it in full right, and it is thus that he carries it from his own hand to his mouth. The two situations are therefore equivalent: whether someone receives a fragment from the priest, or receives several together’. Otto NÜBBAUM points out that the vessels used for communion in the hand were normally designed in such a way that the Body of the Lord was taken into the mouth; cf. **Die Handkommunion**, op. cit., p. 21.

However, given the abuses, the superior of the monastery of Atripe—which the Christians of Egypt held in high esteem—Chenoute (d. 466), found himself obliged ‘to oppose with the utmost rigour any member of the community leaving the Eucharistic celebration and taking the hosts home with them. ‘The priest or deacon must not allow anyone who asks him to grant this favour even a fragment the size of a mustard seed’. LEIPORDT, *Schenute von Atripe und die Entstehung des nationalägyptischen Mönchtums* = TU NF, X, 1 (Leipzig, 1903), p. 184; cf. also p. 31. Quoted in F. J. DÖLGER, *Die Eucharistie als Reiseschutz*, op. cit., p. 240 ff.

faces in the Eucharist, that of acting *in persona Christi* and thus of taking His place whilst at the same time being a sinful man living entirely from the reception of His gift.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, from the very beginning, the early Church took great care not to lose even a single fragment (of the host). In theory, this concern is still observed today ⁱ¹⁰¹. Thus, in a 1973 instruction, we read: ‘Since the instruction *Memoriale Domini*, published three years ago, some episcopal conferences have asked the Apostolic See to allow those who distribute Holy Communion to place the Eucharistic species in the hands of the faithful. As this same instruction points out, the Church’s prescriptions and the writings of the Fathers amply attest to the profound respect and the utmost care that surrounded the Holy Eucharist ^{e102} and which must continue to surround it. In particular, when receiving Communion in this manner, certain precautions must be observed, as experience itself dictates. Constant care and attention must be exercised, especially with regard to fragments that might fall from the hosts. This applies equally to the person distributing Communion and to the faithful, whenever the Holy Species is placed in the hand of the communicant ^{.103}’ Shortly before this, the Congregation for the Defence of the Faith had reaffirmed, in a statement addressing various doubts, that the Real Presence—and therefore the true presence of Christ—also extended to fragments that had broken off from a consecrated host and that, consequently, the prescriptions regarding the purification of the paten and the chalice must be observed ^{s104}. Is the ‘Holy Eucharist’ today treated with ‘the deepest respect and the greatest care’, as the Fathers had done? Is ‘constant care and attention’ observed, particularly with regard to fragments? Anyone who is able and willing to look closely knows how these questions can be answered. This is not a matter of a few isolated instances of excess or abuse here and there. Notorious carelessness has become the norm, and this leads one to conclude that there is a lack of respect and insufficient faith in the Real Presence. All the risks mentioned in the instruction **Memoriale Domini**—namely, the consequences of receiving Communion in the hand, a decline in respect, the desecration of the sacrament and the distortion of the ^{*} of the faith¹⁰⁵—have come to pass and continue to do so. Why, in all Christian Churches, have all rites abandoned the practice of distributing Communion

¹⁰⁰ KIRCHE, *Ökumene, Politik*, Einsiedeln, Johannes Verlag, 1987, p. 19.

¹⁰¹ Among the Orthodox, the warning of Saint Cyril of Jerusalem—urging that care be taken to ensure that not the slightest particle of Christ’s body nor the slightest drop of his blood is lost—continues to be taken seriously. And not only in theory, but also in practice, as evidenced by various precautionary measures. See Christian FELMY, ‘Customs and practices surrounding Holy Communion in the Eastern Orthodox Churches’, in **Bread of Heaven. Customs and Practices Surrounding Holy Communion**, edited by Charles Caspers, Gerard Lukken and Gerrard Rouwhorst, Kampen, Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1995, pp. 41–59, here p. 47 ff.

¹⁰² Instruction **Memoriale Domini**, 29 May 1969; **AAS** 61 [1969], 542.

¹⁰³ Instruction **Immensæ caritatis**, 29 January 1973, **AAS** 65 [1973], pp. 264–271, here p. 270.

¹⁰⁴ Declaration of 2 May 1972, **Notitiæ**, 8 [1972], 227.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. *AAS* 61 [1969], 544.

in the hand? Not because the shape of the hosts has changed, as some believe. Jungmann, for example, thinks that one of the causes might lie in the transition to unleavened bread, n. 106. This cannot be true, if only because it did not take place in the East: there, unleavened bread has normally always been used. If, as Nußbaum¹⁰⁷ suggests, one wishes to explain the change in Eucharistic practice by a change in the shape of the hosts (which became flattened wafers), one must then take into account a decisive factor: in the East, the shape did not change. Why, then, was there no change across all rites? ‘The true cause is far more likely to be found in the fact that there were no positive experiences with lay people receiving Communion in their hands. [...] These are the same experiences we are seeing today and will see more and more: ranging from a lack of respect during reception to the blatant abuse of the Holy Eucharist for superstitious and even satanic purposes (black masses).108’ Klaus Gamber wrote these lines in 1970. His prophetic words have all come true.

The reverence shown by the Fathers, and the ever-deepening faith, have given rise, in both the East and the West, to a manner of receiving Communion which more appropriately expresses faith in the Real Presence and the reverence due to the fragments of the sacramental elements, namely, Communion on the lips. Respect, faith and the desire to see these two realities expressed ever more perfectly by the rite — such is the spirit of the early Church, the spirit of the Fathers. Communion on the lips is the fruit of this loving concern. The instruction **Memoriale Domini** emphasises that communion on the lips must be preserved, ‘not only because it is backed by a tradition stretching back many centuries, but above all because it expresses the faithful’s respect for the Eucharist . 109’

Communion on the lips “ensures more effectively that Holy Communion is distributed with the requisite respect, decorum and dignity, and that any risk of profanation of the Eucharistic elements is averted, in which ‘in a unique way the whole Christ is substantially and continuously present in the unity of his divinity and humanity ’ . 110, and finally to ensure that the care for fragments of consecrated hosts, which the Church has consistently encouraged, is scrupulously and carefully observed . 111”

¹⁰⁶ Cf. *Missarum Sollemnia*, II, op. cit., p. 463.

¹⁰⁷ *Die Handkommunion*, op. cit., p. 28.

¹⁰⁸ Klaus GAMBER, *Ritus Modernus*, op. cit., p. 52.

¹⁰⁹ AAS, 61 [1969], 543.

¹¹⁰ Instruction **Eucharisticum mysterium**, n. 9, *AAS*, 59 [1967], 547.

¹¹¹ **Memoriale Domini**, AAS, 61 [196], 543.