

The Communion Rite in Liturgical Reform

(Part 2 of a Series)
By FR. CLIFFORD HOWELL, S.J.

The historical background of the ceremonies of distributing Holy Communion explain much of the reason for reform of this ritual. Father Howell is an expert in liturgy and has written widely on all phases of the liturgical renewal.

To some extent things have improved since the Council. There are churches wherein the priest now faces the people over the altar so that they can see what he is doing. They see him "take" at least his own host and hear him "bless" it since the canon is now out loud and in English. But even if they do observe that he breaks his own host they gather no meaning from it.

Clearly he is not breaking it in order to give them pieces of it. Nor does he in fact do so. For it is quite usual that none of them receive their sacred food from the altar; they receive it out of a tabernacle from a ciborium consecrated perhaps by some other priest at some other Mass.

Communion still looks like an interruption to the Mass, something separate, something inserted from elsewhere. This impression is especially strong if the priest leaves the altar where he is celebrating in order to go off to another altar which supports the tabernacle so that he may thence obtain the ciborium.

It still does not look like a meal which he is sharing with them, for the paper-like white discs do not look like bread, and were not broken from what he consecrated on the altar, and are not "eaten" in a human way but are (in the usual terminology) "consumed." The symbolism is lamentably poor.

Is there any remedy for this poor and misleading symbolism? Yes; though it cannot be completely validated without further reforms, even now it is possible to improve it very greatly. This, however, involves a

considerable reform in customary clerical practice.

Some priests — happily an increasing number — have seen the point, recognized the possibilities, and are taking the trouble to do the right thing. But others — alas they still seem to be in the majority — have not seen the point and are doing nothing about it on the plea that it is not compulsory.

Tabernacle communion should cease to be normal practice, and should be replaced by altar communion as the usual procedure. The tabernacle should be used only as a supplement and for communion outside Mass when this is necessary. At every Mass attended by the faithful some hosts ought to be consecrated for them; the faithful should see these hosts taken to the altar at the offertory and see those very same hosts given out in communion.

When congregations are large an assistant priest may have to distribute pre-consecrated hosts from a tabernacle — but such necessary recourse to the tabernacle will not greatly detract from the effect of the main source of distribution — the hosts consecrated "at this same Mass" which priest and people have offered together "on this altar." If again and again the people see a ciborium taken to the altar, consecrated and re-distributed to them, they will realize that this is the norm, and that the tabernacle is but a reserve; they will learn the corresponding lesson — that by communion they are sharing in the very sacrifice they have helped to offer, in the same sacred meal that makes them one in Christ. And thereby much will be gained.

It is possible and lawful, moreover, to improve the symbolism still more. There is no law that lays down that altar breads must be white and round and thin, with an appearance nothing like that of bread. On the Continent and in America more and more priests are using large, thick, brown hosts made from whole-meal wheat. They are bread; they look like bread and they

taste like bread. Moreover, they have to be eaten like bread — that is, chewed before they are swallowed. No doubt letting a paper-thin wafer soften in saliva and then swallowing can technically be called "eating," but it is not the ordinary human way in which we eat things. The symbolism is not authentic.

Distributing communion from the tabernacle is a comparatively modern practice; the rubrics of Pius V's Missal show that it was not recognized as normal even as late as 1570. One can but summarize by saying that it was a lack of understanding of Eucharistic symbolism, coupled with reasons of convenience, that led to the spread of tabernacle communion.

Before we had the Canon out loud the anomaly of this practice was not immediately obvious. But now, in the most solemn of all prayers, the people can hear the priest, as their spokesman before God, saying: "As we receive from this altar the sacred body and blood of your Son, let us be filled with every grace and blessing." If they then observe that, though he himself receives "from this altar," he lets nobody else do so, will they not soon realize that something is wrong? Will

he not realize it himself and amend his ways in accordance with the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy and the 1967 S.C.R. Instruction? Let us hope so; it would do much good.

This is an improvement in the communion rite so highly and forcefully commended that it is almost (even though not absolutely) compulsory. For the Church "approves this practice, desires that it be not omitted, and would blame any priest through whose fault or negligence such sharing of the sacrifice should be denied to the faithful" (Mediator Dei, § 126).

The other improvement of using hosts that look like bread instead of like paper is also worth-while and needs no legislation. Yet even if both these things be done, one quite important piece of symbolism still needs to be restored; and that is the "fraction."

At the Last Supper our Lord "took bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to his disciples saying . . ." In the early days of the Church this action of breaking was so prominent and characteristic that it gave rise to the very name by which the Eucharistic celebration was known — "The Breaking of Bread."

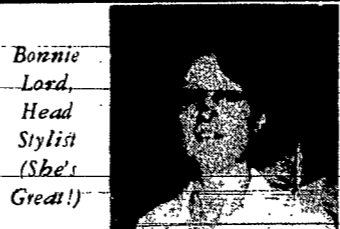
Turnabout! Church Aids State

Seattle — (RNS) — In Washington, a state which has a rigid constitution forbidding aid to churches, the churches are giving financial aid to the state.

The Greater Seattle Council of Churches presented a check for \$1,000 to the State Department of Public Assistance and said it would continue to raise funds to buy prescription drugs for the medically indigent.

Elliott N. Couden, Council of Churches president, said the goal is to raise \$2,500 monthly until July, when a new state biennium begins. The money is being turned over to the Central Area Office of the Public Assistance Department.

This area, where many minority families and low-income people live, is not the only place suffering from lack of funds for medication, but the need is regarded as most critical there.



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By many important measures—sales, earnings, dividends, shareownership, employment—it was Kodak's best year. It was the high point of 10 years of accelerated growth. Since 1958, the company's worldwide sales have more than doubled, while earnings and dividends have more than tripled. You can see the evidence of this dynamic growth in and around Rochester.

At Kodak Park, new facilities and equipment continue to be added to the largest of the company's manufacturing divisions.

In Gates, the new Elm Grove Plant of the Kodak Apparatus Division will provide over 30 acres of floor space for equipment manufacturing.

In Henrietta, buildings are rising at the new Riverwood Marketing Education Center. By 1970, Riverwood will be the hub of a nationwide network of educational units

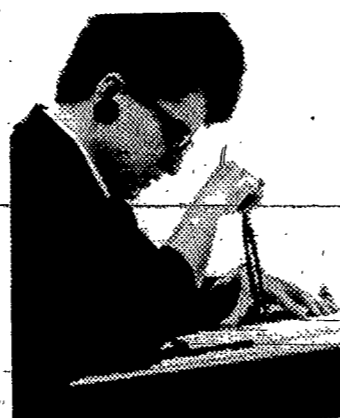
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With their help and loyalty, Kodak looks ahead to another outstanding year.

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Kodak encourages its people to continue their education. Judy Tellez is one of 4,000 men and women who received full-tuition refunds during the last school year.



The company helped F and Rochester Business Opportunities Corporation, a private source of funds for inner-city enterprises. Here is Frank McElrath, a former Kodak employee and now the owner of P. A. Plastics. The company helped train him to run his business and became his first customer.



An interest in education and a degree in industrial design led to a challenging assignment for Wayne Scott. Like several other Kodak people, he is seeking ways to make the educational process more effective, less costly.



New products provide opportunities for personal achievement and progress. Here, Donald H. Dutton, a Kodak Technical Sales Representative, learns about a Kodak printing plate introduced last year.



Kodak people received over 20,000 cash awards under the company's Suggestion System. Russ Wick's earned \$3,065 for devising an easier way to remove excess fibers from raw paper.