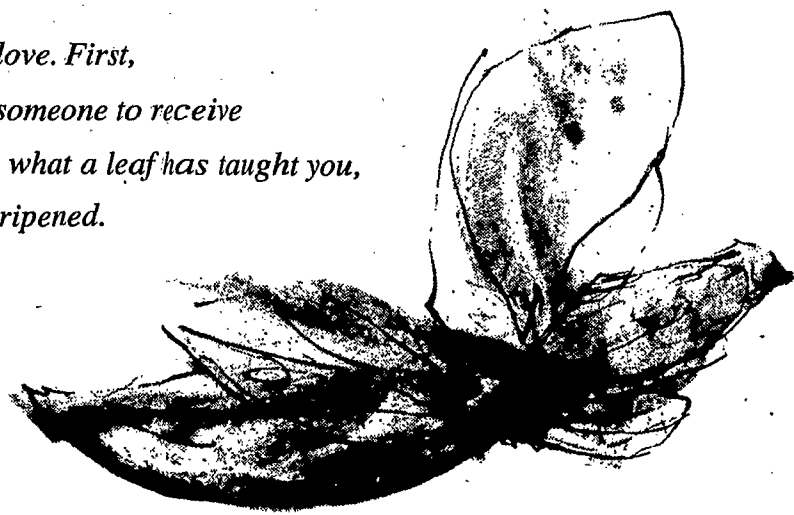


... Learn a little what it is to love. First,
a leaf; a fall of rain, then someone to receive
what a leaf has taught you,
what a fall of rain has ripened.



No easy process, understand; it could take a lifetime, it has
mine, and still I've never mastered it—

I only know how true it is: that love is a

chain of love, as nature is a chain of life."

Judge Cool in The Grass Harp
by Truman Capote.

Scriptures Are for Everybody

By FR. WALTER M. ABBOTT

As we have seen, Jesus called all of His followers to the work of spreading the good news, that is, the news of what God has revealed about Himself in the Scriptures and in the Person of Jesus Himself.

The Second Vatican Council, in chapter 6 of its Constitution on Divine Revelation, made it quite explicit that not only priests and Religious but every member of the people of God should help in bringing the word of God, the Holy Scriptures, to all, Christians and non-Christians. It said that every member of the people of God should "learn by frequent reading of the Divine Scriptures the 'excelling knowledge of Jesus Christ'."

For a long time in the Catholic Church many priests had the idea that the people's knowledge of Scripture should come from the readings in the liturgy and the sermons of priests explaining those passages of the Scriptures, in catechisms, in books about the Scriptures, and especially in "Lives of Christ."

When I say a long time, I mean centuries, going back before the Reformation. Behind this idea was the fear that the reading of the Scriptures themselves, without the help of an authorized interpreter such as the bishop or his delegated assistant, the priest, could be dangerous.

The fear was not a groundless one, and there are certain facts that can be adduced to show it is still a realistic fear. For example, in Africa since World War II about three thousand new independent churches have come into being, usually because someone took up the Scriptures, put his own interpretations together, and founded a new church of his own. There are over 2,000 of these independent churches in South Africa alone, and in the whole of Africa well over 5,000 of them now.

The answer to this problem, however, is not to try to keep the Scriptures out of the people's hands but to give them all the help they need to understand the Scriptures prop-

Scripture in Life Of Church Today

erly. That is the real job of the Church, positive pastoral work, not police work.

I think the trouble in the past was that we did not have many practical programs for implementing the popes' requests that everyone should daily read and pray with the Scriptures. Perhaps part of the problem was that we did not have circulation of the basic information that daily bible reading was approved and recommended, provided you had some helps, at least in the form of annotations, and better still in the form of a companion commentary.

At any rate, an ecumenical council has now spoken out loud and clear. As a result of Vatican II we have a policy of bringing the Word of God to all the people, in their own language, at a price they can afford to pay, which means in the case of those who cannot afford to pay, anything that they will get their Scriptures free.

As a result of it, we are now cooperating with the Bible societies around the world to get the best translations and "easy" prices for the people, especially in Asia and Africa. With the founding of the World Catholic Federation for Biblical Apostolate we are going to have practical programs for understanding and interpreting Scriptures on a scale not known before, especially in Asia and Africa, which is where most of the world's people are.

Vatican II ruled that "easy access to Sacred Scripture should be provided for all. Subsequent study, under the direction of Cardinal Bea, who got the commission from Pope Paul, has shown that "easy" access to Scripture simply does not exist unless they can buy them at a price they can afford to pay, and "all" will not have "easy" access to Scripture unless the very poor who cannot pay anything are given copies of the Scriptures.

These studies led Cardinal Bea to recommend all-out cooperation with the Bible societies wherever possible, because those societies were already far advanced in the work of making translations in the language of people of today and they had realistic policies about pricing and distribution.

That was quite a change in Roman Catholic policy — cooperation with the Bible societies, which had been condemned by

popes in the 19th century, before Leo XIII, for spreading the Scriptures everywhere in the vernacular and making them available to groups that used them to attack the Catholic faith.

Some Catholics are still wary of the Bible societies, and some of the Bible societies' long-time supporters are suspicious of cooperation with Roman Catholics. In general, however, around the world the spirit of cooperation has prevailed.

We are working with the American, Canadian and British Bible Societies, which support translation work in more than six hundred languages, and we have joined the Protestants at work in one hundred and ten of those projects. In those projects, which can legitimately be called "common Bible" translation projects, we are following guiding principles worked out by the Bible societies and Roman Catholic experts approved by Cardinal Bea.

Communion in the Hand: Part I

By FR. JOSEPH M. CHAMPLIN

In a faith filled with mysteries we are ever attempting to follow the middle course. Truth stands in the center and over-emphasis on one side of an issue leads to distortion or neglect of the other.

Too much concentration on the meal concept in Mass can lead us to ignore its sacrificial element.

We see a parallel dynamic at work in the case of Holy Communion considered as divine food for the believing Christian. If we accentuate the "divine" quality of our Eucharist, then the attitude expected in communicants will be reverence and care for so sublime a gift. Such emphasis produced a pattern in past centuries of delayed and infrequent receptions of this sacrament. Pope St. Pius X found it necessary to correct that false practice by restoring the proper procedure of early and frequent Communion.

Conversely, if we zero in on the "food" aspect of the Eucharist, recipients will tend to have a less formal and more familiar approach toward Communion. This easily slips into disrespect or sloppiness and much of past legislation sought to protect the Blessed Sacrament from such abuses.

These articles will describe the present situation, sketch briefly its historical setting, present pros and cons, and suggest a future resolution of the controversy.

KNOW YOUR FAITH

Q. and A.

By FATHER RICHARD McBREEN

Q. Is it still true to say that the laity assists in the work of the hierarchy? It seems to me that this was the usual way of describing "Catholic action" back in the 1940s and 1950s.

A. That earlier notion of Catholic action as the assistance given the hierarchy by the laity reflected a generally clericalist understanding of the Church. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church and the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity manifest a basic shift in perspective.

Chapter II of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church speaks of the Church as "People of God." Chapter IV of the document makes it clear that the council intended all members of the Church, including the laity, to be a part of this People of God. "Everything which has been said so far concerning the People of God applies equally to the laity, Religious, and clergy" (n. 30).

By baptism the laity are made one body with Christ and, in their own way, are made sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ (n. 31). By their very vocation, the document continues, they seek the kingdom of God. And that quest, of course, is at the heart of the mission of the Church. Indeed, "the lay apostolate . . . is a participation in the saving mission of the Church itself. Through their baptism and confirmation, all are commissioned to that apostolate by the Lord Himself" (n. 33).

There is no mention here that the laity shares in the mission of the Church only to the extent that the hierarchy allows. The mission comes from Christ through the sacraments, and not through the leadership personnel of the Church.

That is why there is so much activity and discussion these days about the establishments of parish, diocesan, national, and even international pastoral councils. The life and structure of the Church must reflect the inner nature and mission of the Church. If all Christians are part of the Body of Christ and the People of God, and if all share in the very saving mission of the Church, then all must, as far as possible, participate in those decisions which affect the manner in which the mission of the Church is executed.

And since the mission of the Church embraces liturgy, catechesis, preaching, teaching, political and social involvement, all these matters are proper subjects of joint deliberation and action on the part of laity, Religious, and clergy alike.

To the extent that the Church—whether at the parochial, diocesan, national, or international levels—reflects a monarchical or oligarchical style of operation, to that same extent is the Church unfaithful to its real mission.

The preceding reflections on the role of the laity are made without prejudice to the fact that the ordained priesthood fulfills a special and irreplaceable function within the Church.

Article 10 of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church insists that the common priesthood of the faithful and the ordained priesthood "differ from one another in essence and not only in degree." Nevertheless, the same document reminds us that each is "a participation in the one priesthood of Christ."

In 1968 Pope Paul secretly surveyed bishops of the world and sought their opinion on a possible change in the customary manner of distributing Holy Communion. He did so because several national hierarchies had already requested permission for this in response to a growing wish on the part of many for Communion in the hand.

The results indicated a substantial (about 2:1) majority favored retention of the customary method, i.e., placing the consecrated bread in a communicant's mouth.

As a consequence, he issued on May 29, 1969 an instruction "The Manner of Distributing Holy Communion" (available from the United States Catholic Conference Publications Office, 1312 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005). In it, Paul VI decreed that the traditional practice be observed. He left a path open for bishops in specific countries to propose other arrangements, if they felt the good of their people dictated this.

Since publication of that document perhaps a dozen nations have petitioned and received authorization to introduce Communion in the hand, including our neighbors to the north in Canada.

The more common and present method (placing the host on a communicant's tongue) enjoys the legal force of a cus-

tom reaching back at least 1,100 years. Rev. Mark A. Miller, writing in the 1969 "Sheaf", an annual publication with a controlled circulation for the students and alumni of St. Bernard's Seminary, Rochester, N.Y., gives the historical details establishing that fact.

"The first legislation requiring communicants to receive the host in the mouth seems to have been issued by the Council of Rouen. But when was this Council held? Jungmann, probably following the earlier edition of Mansi, accepts the date 878. But in the 1901 edition, Mansi changes his mind to favor 650, for reasons which he explains there."

Let historians debate the exact time and year. Our concern here is the simple testimony that for more than a millennium Roman Catholics have followed the present method of distributing Communion. This traditional practice seemed during those many centuries the most satisfactory procedure and a suitable way in which to insure adequate reverence for the Sacrament.

Those who wish to modify this policy must argue the case and prove their point by demonstrating that a change would be beneficial. The burden rests upon them. They quite willingly take up this challenge and supply a raft of reasons in support of their opinion.

We will examine these arguments next week.