

# The Truth about Receiving Holy Communion in the Hand



**A Must-Read for all Catholics**

*“Not to oppose error is to approve it,  
and not to defend the truth is to suppress it.”*

Pope St. Felix III

## **What does Church authority say about the practice of Communion in the hand?**

### **The practice was introduced as an abuse:**

Speaking of Communion-in-the-hand, it is necessary for all to recognize that the practice was introduced as an abuse, and hurriedly, in many places within the Church right after the (Vatican II) Council, that it changed the centuries-long earlier practice, and that it is becoming now a regular practice throughout the whole Church.

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### **It was not an authentic liturgical development, never mandated by the Vatican II documents:**

I think it is now time to evaluate carefully the practice of Communion-in-the-hand and, if necessary, to abandon what was actually never called for in the Vatican II document *Sacrosantum Concilium* nor by the Council Fathers but was, in fact, “accepted” after it was introduced as an abuse in some countries.

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### **How did the practice of Communion-in-the-hand come about? <sup>2</sup>**

Established by the Protestants in the 16th Century in defiance of Catholic beliefs and imitated by liberal Catholic priests in Holland after the Vatican II Council...

About 400 years ago, Communion in the hand was introduced into “Christian” worship by men whose motives were rooted in defiance of Catholic beliefs. The 16th Century Protestant reformers re-established Communion in the hand as a means of showing two things:

- 1) That they believed there was no such thing as “transubstantiation” and that the bread used at Communion time was just ordinary bread. In other words, the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist is just a “Papist superstition”, and that the bread is just bread and anybody can handle it.
- 2) Their belief that the minister of Communion is no different in essence

from laymen. Now, it is Catholic teaching that the Sacrament of Holy Orders gives a man a spiritual, sacramental power, it imprints an indelible mark on his soul and makes him different in essence from laymen.

The Protestant's establishment of Communion in the hand was their way of showing their rejection of Catholic belief in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, rejection of the Sacramental Priesthood — in short, to show their rejection of Catholicism altogether.

**From that point on, Communion in the hand received a distinctly anti-Catholic significance. It was a recognizably anti-Catholic practice rooted in disbelief in the Real Presence of Christ and the priesthood.**

### **“Ecumenism” brought in liberal winds of change**

Though Communion in the hand was not mandated by the Second Vatican Council, what was “canonized” by Vatican II was “Ecumenism” — this false spirit of counterfeit unity that had been previously condemned by the Church, particularly by Pope Pius XI in his 1926 encyclical *Mortalium Animos*. This novel ecumenical spirit became rampant during and after Vatican II.

This ecumenical spirit became the primary formative principle in the whole range of the new liturgical forms established since the Council. This is why the new liturgy (Mass) so closely resembles a Protestant service. While few Protestants entered the Church, many Catholics were driven to the exits.

After Vatican II, during the 1960s some ecumenically-minded priests in Holland started giving Communion in the hand, in imitation of Protestant practice. But the bishops, rather than do their duty and stop the abuse, tolerated it.

### **Abuse went unchecked and spread to other countries...**

Because Church leaders allowed the abuse to go unchecked, the practice then spread to Germany, Belgium and France. But if the bishops seemed indifferent to this scandal, the laity were outraged. It was the indignation of large numbers of the Faithful which promoted Pope Paul VI to take

some action. He polled the bishops of the world on this issue, and they voted overwhelmingly to retain the traditional practice of receiving Holy Communion only on the tongue. It must be noted that at this time, the abuse was limited to a few European countries. It had not yet started in the United States.

### **“Memoriale Domine”<sup>3</sup>**

The Pope then promulgated the May 28, 1969 *Instruction Memoriale Domine*. In summary, the document states:

- 1) The bishops of the world were overwhelmingly against Communion in the hand.
- 2) This manner of distributing Holy Communion (that is, the priest placing the Host on the tongue of the communicants) must be observed.
- 3) Communion on the tongue in no way detracts from the dignity of the communicant.
- 4) There was a warning that any innovation could lead to irreverence and profanation of the Eucharist, as well as gradual erosion of correct doctrine.

**The document further says “the Supreme Pontiff judged that the long received manner of ministering Holy Communion to the Faithful should not be changed. The Apostolic See therefore strongly urges bishops, priests and people to observe zealously this law.”**

### **How the abuse spread after Memoriale Domine**

Now, this was the age of compromise, and the document contained the seed of its own destruction, because the Instruction went on to say that where the abuse had already become firmly established, it could be legalized by a two-thirds majority in a secret ballot of the national bishops conference (providing the Holy See confirmed their decision). This played right into the liberals’ hands. And it must be noticed, the Instruction said “where the abuse had already become firmly established”. So, countries in which the practice had not developed were obviously excluded from the concession — and all English-speaking countries,

including the United States, fell into this category.

Naturally, liberal clergy in other countries concluded that if this rebellion could be legalized in Holland, it could be legalized anywhere. They figured that if they ignored *Memoriale Domine* and defied the liturgical law of the Church, this rebellion would not only be tolerated, but eventually legalized. Thus, the disobedience continued and dioceses petitioned Rome to officially permit Communion in the hand. As a result, the Church granted wider permission for Communion in the hand in the instruction *Immensae Caritatis*<sup>4</sup> (On Facilitating Reception of Communion in Certain Circumstances) January 29, 1973. This is why we have Communion in the hand today.

**However, the facts are that Communion on the tongue is still the law of the Church, while Communion in the hand is an exception to the law granted by an indult (special concession), which was granted with severe reservations by Pope Paul VI in his encyclical letter “*Memoriale Domini*”.**

### **Started in Defiance, Perpetuated by Deception**

Not only was Communion in the hand started in disobedience to established Church liturgical laws, it was perpetuated by deceit. Space doesn't allow all the details, but the propaganda in the US in the 1970s that was used to sell Communion in the hand to a trusting, vulnerable people was a campaign of calculated half-truths that didn't tell the whole story. A quick example will be found in the writings of Monsignor Joseph M. Champlin. His writings “Preaching and Teaching about the Eucharist”):

- give the reader the false impression that Vatican II provided a mandate for the abuse when, in fact, it is not hinted at in any Council documents.
- do not tell the reader that the practice was started by clergymen in defiance of established liturgical law but makes it sound as if it were a request from the laity.
- do not make clear to the reader that the world's bishops, when polled, voted overwhelmingly against Communion in the hand.

- do not mention that permission (indult) was only to be a toleration of the abuse where it had already been established by 1969. It was not a green light for it to spread to other countries, like the United States.

Now we are at the point where Communion in the hand is viewed as a superior way of receiving the Eucharist and the vast majority of our little children are being mis-instructed to receive First Communion in the hand. The Faithful are told that it is an optional practice, and if they don't like it, they can receive it on the tongue.

Some liberal bishops have argued that Communion in the hand is the proper way for the faithful to respond to our Lord's invitation: "All of you, take and eat this." What these bishops overlook is the fact that while our Lord did speak these words He issued them within the context of instituting the Sacrament of Holy Orders. These words were addressed to the apostles and not to all Christians indiscriminately.

### **The Teaching of St. Thomas on Eucharist**

St. Thomas, who is the prince of theologians in the Catholic Church, who towers above all the rest, whose *Summa Theologica* was placed on the altar next to the Scriptures during the Council of Trent, and whose teaching Saint Pius X said was the remedy for Modernism ... Saint Thomas clearly teaches that it belongs to the priest and only to the priest to touch and administer the Sacred Host, that "only that which is consecrated" (the hands of the priest) "should touch the Consecrated" (the Sacred Host).

"Behind Communion in the hand — I wish to repeat and make as plain as I can — is a weakening, a conscious, deliberate weakening of faith in the Real Presence . . . Whatever you can do to stop Communion in the hand will be blessed by God." <sup>5</sup> Father John Hardon, S.J.

### **An attitude of reverence (interior and exterior) is necessary in our worship of our Eucharistic Lord**

- The best way to express our sense of reverence toward the Eucharistic Lord was to follow the example of Peter, who, as the Gospel recounts, threw himself on his knees before the Lord and said: "Depart

from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Luke 5:8).

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- Cardinal Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI): Kneeling is the right, indeed the intrinsically necessary gesture before the Living God.<sup>1</sup>

- Pope John Paul II speaks in the encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* of the “wonder and adoration before the unsurpassable gift of the Eucharist” (no. 48) which must be made manifest even in **external gestures**: “With this heightened sense of mystery, we understand how the faith of the Church in the mystery of the Eucharist has found historical expression not only in the demand for an interior disposition of devotion, but also in outward forms meant to evoke and emphasize the grandeur of the event being celebrated” (no. 49).

- In the Book of Revelation, the gesture of prostration of the twenty-four ancient ones before the Lamb can be the model and standard for how the Church on earth should treat the Lamb of God when the Faithful approach Him in the Sacrament of the Eucharist (cf. Revelation 5:8, 14, 19.4).

### **Time for reflection and change**

Pope Paul VI, despite his weaknesses, correctly predicted that Communion in the hand would lead to irreverence and profanation of the Eucharist, and a gradual erosion of correct doctrine —and we have seen this prophecy come to pass.

### **Observation of Cardinal Malcom Ranjith, Secretary of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments:<sup>1</sup>**

“This practice (Communion in hand) contributes to a gradual, growing weakening of the attitude of reverence toward the Sacred Eucharistic Species. The earlier practice (Communion on tongue) on the other hand better safeguards the sense of reverence. Instead, an alarming lack of recollection and an overall spirit of carelessness have entered into liturgical celebrations. One now sees communicants frequently

returning to their places as though nothing extraordinary has happened. Even more, children and adolescents are distracted. In many instances, one does not find that sense of seriousness and interior silence which ought to signal the presence of God in the soul. Then there are abuses of those who take the Sacred Species off to keep as a souvenir, of those who sell the Hosts, or worse yet, of those who take them for the purpose of profaning them in satanic rituals. Such situations have been observed. Furthermore, in large concelebrations, even in Rome, on various occasions one finds the Sacred Species tossed on the ground.”

### **The most solemn act and moment of our day**

Familiarity breeds contempt. We must always be alert and remind ourselves that receiving Holy Communion is no ordinary event. The worship and adoration of our Eucharistic Lord Jesus in our hearts must be translated into external body postures and attitudes of reverence. Receiving our infinitely lovable and adorable Lord, God and King in His entirety - His Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity - is the most solemn act and moment of our day, and it should be so reflected in our entire person – heart, mind, soul and body.

*Eucharistic Lord Jesus, may You receive from all Your unworthy creatures all the love, adoration, reverence and devotion that You rightly deserve!*

### **References**

1. Dominus Est – It is the Lord! By The Most Reverend Athanasius Schneider.
2. The Truth About Communion in the Hand by John Vennari, Catholic Family News. [www.cfnews.org/comhand.htm](http://www.cfnews.org/comhand.htm).
3. *Memoriale Domine* (Instruction On the Manner of Administering Holy Communion), May 28, 1969
4. *Immensae Caritatis* (On Facilitating Reception of Communion in Certain Circumstances), January 29, 1973.
5. Father John Hardon, S.J., November 1, 1997, Call to Holiness Conference, Detroit, Michigan. [www.therealpresence.org](http://www.therealpresence.org)