

The Eucharist: Sign of Inclusion or Exclusion?

Timothy Radcliffe OP

A year ago I gave some lectures to an ecumenical gathering of RAF chaplains in Germany. Each denomination took its turn to organise our common worship. When it was our turn, we celebrated the Eucharist, beginning with the firm assertion that only Catholics could receive communion. If it had not been so painful it might have been laughable.

So the Eucharist: sign of inclusion or exclusion? I did not know the answer when I accepted to give the lecture, but hoped to arrive at one. Like Houdini wrapping himself in chains and jumping into the Thames, I trusted that before time ran out, I would have untangled the knots. Alas, I am still scrabbling around on the riverbed.

This is an area about which I have no special knowledge. All that I am able to do is to share with you a few intuitions. But I console myself, as so often, by thinking of one of my brethren who gave a lecture in America. When he concluded, the applause was tepid. He turned to the man beside him and said, 'I hope that it was not that bad.' And the man replied 'I don't blame you. I just blame the people who asked you to lecture in the first place.'

There are four ways in which the Eucharist may be experienced as exclusive.

There is the exclusion of Christians who are not Catholic. Many experience this as a profound rejection. I tried to make sense of the Catholic position in an article in *The Tablet* some sixteen years ago.¹ This provoked a flood of hate mail, and the wife of one friend refused to speak to me for fifteen years. So I feel a little nervous in returning to the subject.

There is the exclusion of Catholics who are in what are called "irregular" situations, the divorced and remarried, people living with partners or in a gay relationship. This is an ever growing proportion of Catholics in this country.

There is the implicit exclusion of the poor from our celebrations of the Eucharist and our lives. In this country, it is ever less the case that we share a common life, inhabit the same spaces, and our separation from the poor of the developing countries is becoming ever more profound.

¹ 'The demands of the Mass', *The Tablet*, 1 December 1990, p. 1554f.

Finally, there is an exclusion which I will not even try to address. That is the exclusion of women from ordination, so that for many women the Eucharist is experienced as the sign of a male dominated institution in which they do not feel at home.

The Eucharist is the Church

I shall begin by giving a brief presentation of what I understand to be the Church's reasons for the first of these exclusions, of Christians who are not Roman Catholics. I will not refer to intercommunion with the Orthodox since I know nothing about that topic. It is true that a couple of years ago, together with a Greek Orthodox Archbishop, I did receive from the Bari Ecumenical Institute an award for my contribution to Catholic Orthodox dialogue. When I contacted my brethren who run the Institute and explained that I had never ever taken part in dialogue with the Orthodox, they explained that my contribution was purely implicit! Having presented what I understand to be the logic of the Church's discipline, I shall then ask why it still leaves me feeling a little uneasy, and what might be the way forward.

The basis for the Roman Catholic rejection of intercommunion with other Christians is, if I understand it correctly, that to be a Roman Catholic is to be someone whose life is orientated towards receiving the body and blood of Christ at the Eucharist. One may not be able to because one is too young or in a state of mortal sin or an irregular situation, but the core of one's identity as a Catholic is the reception of the sacrament. Matthew Levering writes, 'The Eucharist makes – and is – the Church'.² So the reception of the Eucharist is not just something that Catholics happen to do, and to which we might invite other Christians from time to time. To receive communion at a Catholic Eucharist is to be a Catholic, and to be a Catholic is be orientated towards the receiving of communion.

And the community of which the Eucharist is the celebration is not just this particular congregation gathered around this altar in Ushaw, for example, but the whole Church, all over the globe, the living and the dead, saints and sinners. So for someone to receive communion is to find their identity in this Catholic community, an identity which is more fundamental than any identity which we may receive from our families, from ethnicity or nationality, or politics or our own individual history. Our membership of the Church is not an end in itself. Ultimately, as Catholics, we find our identity in the Kingdom. We are, to adapt Nicholas Boyle's phrase, 'future citizens of the

² M. Levering, *Sacrifice and Community: Jewish Offering and Christian Eucharist*, Oxford 2005, p. 96.

Kingdom.’ The Roman Catholic Church claims to be ‘a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of the unity of the entire human race’ (*Lumen Gentium I*).

It follows that for anyone to present themselves for communion, whether they are Catholic or not, is to accept that they are members of this spacious community, across the centuries, across divisions of sin, across the globe. And that this particular community is a sign – and there may be others – of the ultimate unity of humanity in Christ. If someone who was not a Roman Catholic were to present themselves for communion in our church, then I could not turn them away. But if they were to continue to do so, then it would make sense to ask them whether they accept the meaning of this act. Do you really want to be in communion not just with these nice liberal people at the 9.30 Mass at Blackfriars, but with Catholics all over the world, with Pope Benedict? Do you really wish to be in communion with not only cuddly saints like St Francis of Assisi but also with the Church of the Borgias and the Inquisition? Do you wish to be in communion not only with the fathers of the Councils of Nicea and Ephesus but also with Trent and the First Vatican Council? And if you do, it might sound rather as if you wished to be a Roman Catholic!

So, if I understand it aright, the rationale for the Church’s discipline on intercommunion is not that it wishes to police its borders, and exclude people, like those who guard the doors of the VIP lounge at Heathrow. Rather the Eucharist is the celebration of a community which is called to be radically inclusive, and whose inclusivity is a sign, and perhaps not the only sign, of the unimaginable gathering in of all of humanity into the Kingdom in Christ. So, if one accepts this interpretation of communion, then what is at issue when someone presents themselves is not whether they will be included or excluded, but whether they wish to accept the breadth of inclusion which the Catholic Eucharist signifies. If they were to respond that they could cope with Aquinas but not with Torquemada, or the Council of Chalcedon but not with the First Vatican Council, then, one could argue, that it is not the Church which is being exclusive.

Of course it appears paradoxical that a sign of the Kingdom’s all embracing inclusion should be a community which is limited and which has boundaries. But the Church might reply that this is only an apparent paradox. Signs are necessarily *not* what they signify. The Church is not the Kingdom. Jorge Luis Borges wrote a story, I seem to remember, of a someone who tried to make a map which was the same size as the country which it represented, and it turned out not to be very useful. It did not show anything. Another analogy might be marriage. We claim that this is a sign and sacrament of Christ’s union with the Church, but that does not mean that we can all sleep with each other.

One objection to this line of reasoning might be that all baptised Christians are members of the body of Christ. We are already given that fundamental unity in him. Since we are united by baptism in the body of Christ then it is right that we should all gather to share the sacrament of Christ whose body we are.

I assume that the reply of the Church would be that it is indeed true that by baptism we are indeed one in Christ. There is a unity in Christ that nothing can destroy. But it is a unity that is concealed by the divisions between Christians. It is masked.

We are bodily beings and so we need visible, material signs. The Eucharist offers us a tangible, bodily sacrament of the body of Christ. For Thomas it was even important that the bread and wine should taste and smell good, so that we have a sign of the attractiveness of Christ. So too we need a visible sign of the unity of the body of Christ across the centuries, across space and division. It is not enough for that unity to be implicit. It must be visibly embodied. And the Church teaches that it “subsists” in the Catholic Church. With all its tensions and divisions, the organic and doctrinal unity of the Church is a sign of the ultimate unity of humanity in the Kingdom. This is not to say that the Catholic Church is the only visible sign of the body of Christ. In *Ut unum sit* John Paul II recognised that in other Christian communities ‘certain features of the Christian mystery have at times been more effectively emphasized’ (6) than in the Catholic Church. So, the argument would go, to receive communion in the Catholic Church without identifying with that whole communion would be to subvert the sign.

Of course, the Catholic Church does accept that there are certain circumstances in which Christians who are members of other churches may receive communion. For example, if a baptised person who is in danger of death and ‘who is unable to have recourse for the sacrament desired to a minister of his or her own Church or ecclesial Community, asks for the sacrament on his or her own initiative, manifests Catholic faith in this sacrament and is properly disposed’³, then they may be welcomed. Perhaps even this exception springs again from the profoundly Catholic rooting of identity in belonging. Faced with the isolation of death, the dissolution of all community, then we must share the body of Christ in whom all solitude is overcome.

I have never studied the Church’s views on intercommunion in depth, but that seems to me to be its core. It makes coherent theological sense, but even so I find myself a little uneasy. As my Jesuit friend, Keith Pecklers, said of Jesus: ‘It is difficult to imagine this friend of prostitutes and tax collectors reading a statement about who

³ *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms of Ecumenism*, 131

should or should not come to Holy Communion.’⁴ How can we find a way forward?

The Church’s position is, I think, founded on our need for visible signs, sacraments. Maybe my uneasiness lies in the fact that the Church is sometimes not a very good sign of the unity of the Kingdom. If it were a better sign, then the Church’s position might make more evident sense. This raises all sorts of questions, such as how the Magisterium should deal with theological pluralism and dissent? How do we respond to inculturation and transcend Eurocentrism? All that I have time to address are those first three exclusions from the Eucharist: of non-Catholics, those in irregular situations and, implicitly, the poor.

What sort of sign?

Let’s begin with the words of Jesus over the bread and the cup in Mark’s account of the Last Supper: ‘And as they were eating, he took bread, and blessed and broke it, and gave it to them and said, “Take; this is my body.” And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I say to you, I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God”’ (14.22–25).

The bread was given to the small group of Jesus’ disciples gathered together in the upper room. Mark does not mention any other than the apostles being present, but if there were they would also have been of Jesus’ inner circle. The Passover was a feast celebrated with family and friends. There should be at least ten people present,⁵ but not a vast gathering.

The focus of the words over the cup is different. The blood is shed for them and for ‘the many’. This is a reference to Isaiah 53, the suffering servant who will ‘make many to be accounted righteous and he shall bear their iniquities’ (v11). The cup points to the Kingdom, when Jesus will drink it again and when all of God’s children will be gathered together. Matthew has almost exactly the same words. In Paul and Luke there is a similar tension between the present gathering of the Church and our reaching out for the Kingdom, though it is not linked with differences of the words over the bread and the cup.

This suggests that the Eucharist embodies a double-layered Christian identity, which is both particular and yet reaches out to

⁴ K. Pecklers, *Worship*, London 2003, p. 205.

⁵ b.Pes. 64b.

universality. Different Christian denominations live this tension differently. As Roman Catholics, we have our particular identity. We express it in various ways of speaking and praying, feasting and fasting, living and dying. With all the vast diversity of local churches, we have certain family resemblances. We are bound together in unity by, among other things, the shared teaching of the Church and our communion with the see of Rome. We are indeed Roman.

But the cup points us to further depth of identity. We reach out for the Kingdom, in which the Church will be no more. We aspire to a universality that pushes us beyond any identity that we could ever imagine. We are Catholic. So, to be Roman Catholic is to have an identity which is both known and yet to be discovered. It is given and awaited. This tension is beautifully expressed in 1 John: 'Beloved, we are God's children *now*; it does not yet appear what we *shall be*, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is' (3.2–3). This suggests that the Church should be a strange sort of sign. To be a visible sign at all, then it must have a particular identity. It cannot be just a vague Jesus movement, held together by the conviction that Jesus is rather a good thing. But it is only a visible sign of the Kingdom by always seeking to transcend any identity that it has achieved. It is a sign of the Kingdom by reaching beyond itself. Any self-definition is provisional.

When the disciples saw Jesus break the bread at Emmaus, 'their eyes were opened and they recognised him; and he vanished from their sight' (Luke 24.31). Jesus made a visible sign that culminated in his invisibility. The Church is a visible sign which always tends towards its own disappearance. St Paul says, 'for as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes' (1 Cor. 11.26). We share Christ's death, and that includes a dying of the Church to what it has been until now, to any identity that we have secured. Nicholas Boyle writes: 'When the Church finds what is unholy, then it must say "For this too Christ died" . . . In such moments the Church too must die, must swallow its pride, give up the boundary which it thought defined its existence, and discover a new and larger vocation. And that new vocation will itself be defined by a new boundary which in time the Church will also have to transcend.'⁶

On the day of Pentecost the Church was gathered together 'in one place' (Acts 2.1). That was a visible sign of unity that was lost when the Church spread out from Jerusalem. Perhaps the first Christians were reluctant to leave Jerusalem because it meant a dying

⁶ N. Boyle, *Sacred and Secular Scriptures: A Catholic Approach to Literature*, London 2004, p. 105.

to a certain sort of obvious unity. Never again would the Church gather 'in one place.' To be a visible sign of the Kingdom, embracing the Gentiles, it had to lose a certain visibility. When house churches were established around the Empire, then it was usual for there to be just one celebration of the Eucharist in each place on the Lord's Day. This was the gathering of the Christians of this place, which was another sort of visible sign. I believe that this is still the custom with some Eastern churches.

When Father Rutilio Grande was shot by a death squad, Oscar Romero ordered that there be a single Mass celebrated in the Archdiocese of San Salvador that Sunday. In the face of the divisions within the Church, everyone, rich and poor, regardless of party, should gather around the one altar. That sort of visible unity has been lost with the multiplicity of parishes in each city, and the multiplicity of Masses in each parish. How do we signify that gathering for the 8 am Mass is the communion of the universal Church and ultimately a sign of the unity of the whole of humanity, when one can choose rather to go to the 10 am or 6 pm Masses? One might look like a consumer choosing between Sainsbury's and Tesco's. And if so, why not chose between the Catholic and the Anglican Eucharist? Which offers, in every sense, the best service?

So the Church can only be a visible sign of unity of the Kingdom, if it is seen to be reaching beyond who and what she is now towards an identity that is not yet known. This means that missionary outreach and a passion for ecumenical reconciliation is an intrinsic part of the Church being herself. If the Church peeps over the ecclesial barriers with a sense of assured identity, of self-satisfaction and superiority, then she contradicts the sign that she is called to be. Her particularity ceases to be a sign of universality. We have to show that, separated from other Christians, we are incomplete, less than we are called to be, wounded in our own identity. If we were to be seen to be reaching out hungrily, almost desperately, to other Christians, eager to leave behind who and what we have been so that we may find ourselves with and in them, then maybe the absence of intercommunion might be seen not as exclusive but as a sign of our hunger for the Kingdom. To use an old fashioned and outdated metaphor, it might be like the passionate abstinence of an engaged couple. Indeed the Church's position on intercommunion and sex before marriage may be hard for our society to grasp for similar reasons!

I will now look briefly at the way in which the Church is wounded as a visible sign of unity through the explicit exclusion of those who are in irregular situations and the implicit exclusion of the poor from our gatherings and identity. It is only if we also address these areas, that the particular identity of the Church may become more evidently a sign of ultimate unity.

The home of saints and sinners

To be a Roman Catholic is to have one's life orientated towards participation in the Eucharist. But vast numbers of members of Church are excluded because they are living in what are called "irregular situations" but which are on the way to becoming the norm: The divorced and remarried, people living with a partner or in a gay relationship are not officially welcome at the altar. Of course many dioceses and priests look for a "pastoral solution", but this can appear dishonest, a way of getting around the rules.

When the West was overwhelmingly Christian and society gave powerful support to the institution of marriage and gravely penalized divorce, then it might have been scandalous to receive the sacrament while living in a way that blatantly contradicted the teaching of the Church. But in the contemporary West, with the institution of marriage in such a crisis, anyone may find themselves in such a situation. As moral theologians say, 'Shit happens!'. Millions of decent and committed Catholics find themselves in "irregular" situations perhaps through no fault of their own, or through the sort of weakness that afflicts every one of us. To insist that, in order to return to the sacrament, they must renounce relationships that they have formed and in which they have acquired responsibilities, seems unrealistic and even wrong. It may require them to be unfaithful and thus contradict the deep meaning of the Eucharist as a sacrament of God's eternal fidelity to humanity. In a traditional Catholic society it might have been a scandal to admit those who are remarried to the sacrament. Today it may be scandalous permanently to exclude them. It wounds the Church as a visible sign of Kingdom, the home of saints and sinners. In whatever mess we may find ourselves, there must be some way home, maybe including some ceremony of re-admission, some public expression of healing and reconciliation, as in the Orthodox churches.

An historical analogy is the crisis in Carthage over the re-admission of the lapsed in the third century. During the persecution, many Christians worshipped idols or obtained certificates that saved their lives. The original discipline of the Church excluded them from a return to the sacrament. But the scale of the exclusion forced the Church to re-think its discipline. Many of the lapsed had done so in order to protect their families. They had often showed courage in hiding people who had confessed their faith. The Christian community simply could not accept the permanent rejection of such admirable Christians. J.Patout Burns writes, 'The bonds of gratitude joining the faithful to their penitent benefactors effectively undercut the charge of apostasy and put intense pressure on the bishop to assure them eventual admission to the communion. Clearly the people judged that these demonstrations

of loyalty to the community would win God's forgiveness'.⁷ Cyprian had to think again. Maybe we have reached such a situation today that we too must rethink Church discipline on this issue if we are to be a plausible sign of Christ's body.

This is not to say that no sin ever merits excommunication. In *Torture and the Eucharist*, William Cavanaugh argues that excommunication should only be for 'those kinds of sins which impugn the identity of the body of Christ'.⁸ He gives the example of the seven Chilean bishops who, in December 1980 during the Pinochet regime, excommunicated the torturers in their respective dioceses. They recognised that their hands were consecrated to pardon rather than to condemn, 'because these hands should be an extension of the hands of Jesus.' Ever since the time of St Paul the Church has recognised the need for discipline when confronted with sins that destroy the Church as a visible sign of unity. 'These are the sins which affect the common good, the dignity of persons and the sense of unity which signifies communion.'⁹

But excommunication should always be medicinal in character. It is never intended to permanently shut out someone, but to help them to find their way back. It makes visible the exclusion that they have already chosen and helps them to remedy it. It says, 'you are already outside our communion. This is what you need to do to come back in.'¹⁰ When Ambrose of Milan excommunicated Theodosius, he said to him, 'Submit to the exclusion to which God, the Lord of all, wills to sentence you. He will be your physician; he will give you back your health.' Surely for those in irregular situations, we too must offer a way home to a place at the altar.

Discerning the Body

Then there is the implicit exclusion of the poor. Our first account of the Eucharist, in 1 Corinthians 11, focuses on this issue. It seems that the rich were bringing their own food and drink and sharing it among themselves, and probably only sharing bread and wine – and perhaps rather inferior wine – with the poor. This is probably what St Paul meant when he wrote that 'anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself' (11. 29).

⁷ J Patout Burns, *Cyprian the Bishop*, London 2002, p. 62. Renewed persecution threatened and some of the lapsed might die without being strengthened by the body and blood of Christ.

⁸ W. Cavanaugh, *Torture and the Eucharist: Theology, Politics and the Body of Christ*, Oxford 1998, p. 247.

⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 254.

¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 243.

In the early Church there was an intrinsic link between admission to the Eucharist and care for the poor. When people asked to be baptised, they were questioned: 'Have they honoured the widows? Have they visited the sick? Have they done every kind of good work?'¹¹ One of the primary roles of the bishop was to raise money for almsgiving. A good bishop was described as 'beggar-loving'. Jerome said that 'It is the glory of the bishop to provide for the needs of the poor.'¹² There was regular preaching for alms and a chest at the back of the church for gifts for the poor. More than charity it was a matter of orthodoxy. Nicene and Arian bishops accused each other of violence against the poor.¹³ After the conversion of Constantine, the poor began to slip into invisibility. Funds were being diverted into maintaining the bishops in the style to which they were rapidly becoming accustomed, and for building, maintaining and decorating churches for the growing congregations.

We pray in the Third Eucharistic prayer: 'From age to age you gather a people to yourself so that from east to west a perfect offering may be made to the glory of your name.' How can a perfect offering be made from north to south, so that the poor are present at our Eucharists? How can we learn to discern the body of Christ?

Richard Finn OP points out that one of the contributions of Christianity in the fourth-century was to redescribe the poor. The pagans called them 'base and ignoble'. Christians described them as the 'needy' or 'the afflicted'. They were identified with Christ. They were our brothers and sisters, friends, fellow servants. They not only received alms but prayed for their benefactors in return.¹⁴ In other words, the poor were included within the identity of the Christian community. So sharing the body of Christ should fundamentally challenge our self-understanding. *We* are starving in Zimbabwe; *we* are used for child prostitution in Thailand; *we* are bombed in Baghdad.

The Eucharist subverts the radical individualism of our culture. We are not solitary monads but future citizens of the Kingdom. William Cavanaugh wrote, 'In the Eucharist the foundational distinction between mine and thine is radically effaced (Acts 2.44–47). Christ's restoration of the *imago Dei* in humanity is consummated in individuals in the Eucharist in which our separation is overcome precisely by participation in Christ's body.'¹⁵ De Lubac went so far as to say that in Christ we can no more talk about humans in the plural

¹¹ W. Cavanaugh, *Torture and the Eucharist*, p. 238.

¹² R. Finn OP, *Alms Giving in the Later Roman Empire: Christian Promotion and Practice* 313–450, p. 262.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 182, 264.

¹⁵ 'The City: beyond secular parodies', *Radical Orthodoxy*, London 1999, p. 194.

than we can talk about three gods.¹⁶ It is not only the bread and wine that is changed. We are transformed in our relationship with each other and in our sense of identity. Giles Emory OP of Fribourg wrote, 'Thomas closely links the substantial conversion of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ (transubstantiation) and our own conversion in Christ who is the end (*finis*) of this conversion'.¹⁷ Transubstantiation points to the transformation of who we are.

Secondly, the Eucharist should touch our deepest desires. Catherine Pickstock shows that for Aquinas, the liturgy of the Eucharist cultivates the desire for the sacrament. Aquinas 'insists that what is primarily salvific, even if one does not receive, is *desire* for the Body and Blood of Christ. And this tends to make sense of the fact that we can never receive once and for all, and have to go on receiving. . . . Thus Aquinas repeatedly suggests that the whole of the liturgy is primarily directed towards preparing in people a proper attitude of receptive expectation.'¹⁸ So it should belong to the celebration of the Eucharist that it cultivates a passionate desire to receive the body and blood of Christ, found in the least of his brothers and sisters.

According to Aquinas, the culmination of Christ's sacrificial love is his bearing the anguish of our separation from God and from each other. His anguish is the deeper because he is innocent. Sin dulls the pain of separation. Matthew Levering writes that Christ 'can only fully bear the anguish of the rejection of God, because he has not rejected God. In knowing God, he can know, and experience, the full reality of the anguish which is separation from God – in other words, the full reality of injustice. "Separation from God", after all, is metaphysically constituted not as a spatial reality, or even primarily is an emotional state, but as "injustice". Anguish over injustice can be experienced by the saint more profoundly than by the sinner to whom the injustice belongs.'¹⁹ So, it belongs to our proper participation in the body and blood of Christ, that we share in Christ's anguish at the injustice of poverty, the pain of suffering humanity. Otherwise our Eucharist is an empty sign.

I must conclude. I began by identifying four great exclusions which seem to mark our celebration of the Eucharist: of other Christians, of those in irregular situations, of the poor, and of women. I shall pass over the last. I argue that the Church's discipline with regard to other Christians does make theological sense in so far as we regard sharing in the body and blood of Christ not just something that we happen

¹⁶ cf. Cavanaugh, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

¹⁷ quoted by Levering p. 194.

¹⁸ C. Pickstock, 'Thomas Aquinas and the Eucharist', *Modern Theology*, Vol 15/2, April 1999, p. 176.

¹⁹ M. Levering, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

to do, but constitutive of the being of the Roman Catholic Church. The Church makes the Eucharist and the Eucharist the Church.

But the particular identity of the Roman Catholic Church implies a yearning for self-transcendence. We are a particular community which should always be seen to be reaching beyond itself, dying to what we have been, impatient to overcome disunity, being properly ourselves in acknowledging our incompleteness without others. The heart of our present identity is the promise that we shall be more than we are now. If this was evident, visible, then the Church's discipline on intercommunion might be seen to be a discipline in the deepest sense, an unending apprenticeship, learning who we are called to become together in the Lord.

So what is at issue is not exclusion, but the painful and unending transformation that is required if the Church is to be a visible sign of the gathering in of humanity into the Kingdom. This should make us reflect again on the appropriateness of excluding those in irregular situations from receiving the body and blood of Christ. How can the Church be a plausible sign of the Kingdom if some of its members may have no viable way home? Finally we must discern the body of Christ in the poor. Our Eucharistic theology challenges the individualism of our culture that would see receiving communion as just another consumer choice: Shall it be the 8 am Mass or the 11am? Shall it be Catholic or Anglican this week? Unless we are seen to live by a different sense of identity, then the Church's reservations about intercommunion will be seen merely as arrogant and exclusive, an empty sign. As Flannery O'Connor said, 'if it is only a symbol, to hell with it.'

Timothy Radcliffe OP
Blackfriars
Oxford OX1 3LY
timothy.radcliffe@english.op.org