

# Liturgy and Lager XIV

## Communion in the Hand

June 6, 2009



1. WHAT IS THE CURRENT LAW?
  - a. CURRENT UNIVERSAL LAW IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Universal Law: The faithful are not permitted to take up the consecrated bread or the sacred chalice themselves, and still less, hand them on to one another.

b. CURRENT ADAPTATIONS TO THE UNIVERSAL LAW IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

American Adaptation: The norm for reception of Holy Communion in the dioceses of the United States is standing. Communicants should not be denied Holy Communion because they kneel. Rather, such instances should be addressed pastorally, by providing the faithful with proper catechesis on the reasons for this norm.

When receiving Holy Communion, the communicant bows his or her head before the sacrament as a gesture of reverence and receives the Body of the Lord from the minister. The consecrated host may be received either on the tongue or in the hand at the discretion of each communicant. When Holy Communion is received under both kinds, the sign of reverence is also made before receiving the Precious Blood.

c. RECENT DISCIPLINE OF PASTORAL ABUSE SCANDAL  
Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments  
Responses to Questions on Kneeling for Communion

*The responses to questions were published in the November-December 2002 edition of Notitiae, the official publication of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. These responses represent the view of the Holy See on the questions of kneeling to receive Holy Communion and the right of Catholics to address concerns to the Holy See. (See Appendix 1)*

2. HOW DID CURRENT PRACTICE EVOLVE?

a. HISTORICAL TIMELINE

- i. ST. SIXTUS I (115-125). Prohibited the faithful from even touching the Sacred Vessels: "Statutum est ut sacra vasa non ab aliis quam a sacratibus Dominoque dicatis contrectentur hominibus..." [It has been decreed that the Sacred Vessels are not to be handled by others than by those consecrated and dedicated to the Lord.]
- ii. POPE ST. EUTYCHIAN (275-283). Forbade the faithful from taking the Sacred Host in their hand.
- iii. ST. BASIL THE GREAT, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH (330-379). "The right to receive Holy Communion in the hand is permitted only in time of persecution." St. Basil considered Communion in the hand so irregular that he did not hesitate to consider it a grave fault.
- iv. COUNCIL OF SARAGOSSA (380). It was decided to punish with excommunication anyone who dared to continue the practice of Holy Communion in the hand.
- v. COUNCIL OF TOLEDO (400). Confirmed the decree of the Council of Saragossa on Communion in the hand.

- vi. POPE ST. LEO I THE GREAT (440-461). Energetically defended and required faithful obedience to the practice of administering Holy Communion on the tongue of the faithful.
- vii. SYNOD OF ROUEN (650). Condemned Communion in the hand to halt widespread abuses that occurred from this practice, and as a safeguard against sacrilege. “[Priests] do not put the Eucharist in the hands of any layman or laywoman but only in their mouths.”
- viii. SIXTH ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, AT CONSTANTINOPLE (680-681). Forbade the faithful to take the Sacred Host in their hand, threatening the transgressors with excommunication.
- ix. ST. THOMAS AQUINAS (1225-1274). "Out of reverence towards this sacrament [the Holy Eucharist], nothing touches it, but what is consecrated; hence the corporal and the chalice are consecrated, and likewise the priest's hands, for touching this sacrament." (Summa Theologica, Pars III, Q. 82, Art. 3, Rep. Obj. 8)
- x. COUNCIL OF TRENT (1545-1565). "The fact that only the priest gives Holy Communion with his consecrated hands is an Apostolic Tradition."
- xi. "It must be taught, then, that to priests alone has been given power to consecrate and administer to the faithful, the Holy Eucharist. That this has been the unvarying practice of the Church, that the faithful should receive the Sacrament from the priests, and that the officiating priests should communicate themselves, has been explained by the Council of Trent, which has also shown that this practice, as having proceeded from Apostolic tradition, is to be religiously retained..."
- xii. POPE PAUL VI (1963-1978). "This method [on the tongue] must be retained." (Apostolic Epistle "Memoriale Domini")
- xiii. POPE JOHN PAUL II (1978-2005). "To touch the sacred species and to distribute them with their own hands is a privilege of the ordained. (Dominicae Cenaе, sec. 11)
- xiv. "Eucharistic Communion. Communion is a gift of the Lord, given to the faithful through the [priest] [consecrated] for this purpose. It is not permitted that the faithful should themselves pick up the consecrated bread and the sacred chalice, still less that they should hand them from one to another." (Inaestimabile Donum, April 17, 1980, sec. 9)

b. THE PROTESTANTS

Martin Bucer (excommunicated in 1518) was a heretic based in Strasbourg who influenced Lutheran, Calvinist, and Anglican doctrines and was considered a principle architect of Lutheran and Calvinist doctrine on communion. Although originally a member of the Dominican Order, after meeting Martin Luther in 1518 he arranged for his monastic vows to be annulled. He wrote as follows:

*“Every superstition of the Roman Antichrist is to be detested ... I have no doubt that this usage of not putting these sacraments in the hands of the faithful has been introduced out of a double superstition; firstly, the false honour they wished to show this sacrament, and secondly the wicked arrogance of priests claiming*

*greater holiness than that of the people of Christ, by virtue of the oil of consecration.*

*“I should wish that pastors and teachers of the people should be commanded that each is faithfully to teach the people that it is superstitious and wicked to think ... that the hands of the ministers are holier than the hands of the laity; so that it would be wicked, or less fitting, as was formerly wrongly believed by the ordinary folk, for the laity to receive these sacraments in the hand; and therefore that the indications of this wicked belief be removed—as that the ministers may handle the sacraments, but not allow the laity to do so, and instead put the sacraments into the mouth—which is not only foreign to what was instituted by the Lord but offensive to human reason.*

*“In this way good men will be easily brought to the point of all receiving the sacred symbols in the hand...”*

c. POST-VATICAN II (1969-PRESENT)

With liberal clerics and lay theologians still reeling from the recent Papal Encyclical *Humane Vitae*, Communion in the Hand first started in Holland as an act of defiance of legitimate authority of Pope Paul VI. Mandatory liturgical norms were defied and Communion was distributed in some Catholic churches in what had been, since the Reformation, the characteristically Protestant manner. It was an abuse and should have been dealt with by the bishops immediately and effectively. Priests who refused to conform to the law of the Church should have been suspended. Such action was not taken, and the practice spread to Germany, Belgium, and France. In these countries the Bishops also neglected their office and allowed the abuse to continue. Thus a practice which had already been made unacceptable to Catholics because of its adoption by Protestants to symbolize their rejection of Catholic Eucharistic teaching, was made doubly unacceptable when it became a symbol of the rejection of ecclesiastical authority by Liberal clerics.

The consequences of this rebellion became so serious that the Pope consulted the Bishops of the world, and, after obtaining their opinions, promulgated the Instruction *Memoriale Domini*, in 1969. This Instruction contained the following principal points:

- i. The Bishops of the world were overwhelmingly against the innovation.
- ii. The traditional manner of distributing Holy Communion must be retained.
- iii. The innovation could lead to irreverence, profanation, and the adulteration of correct doctrine.

Therefore it was Resolved:

"The Apostolic See strongly urges bishops, priests, people to observe this law, valid and again confirmed, according to the judgment of the majority of the Catholic episcopate, in the form which the present rite of the sacred liturgy employs, and out of concern for the common good of the Church."

It was agreed, however, that wherever the practice "has already developed in any place" a two-thirds majority of the Episcopal conference could petition the Holy See for permission to legalize the abuse. Quite clearly, the phrase "has already developed" meant by that date, May 28, 1969. Countries where the practice had not developed by that date were obviously excluded from the concession-----and all the English-speaking countries come into this category. Liberal priests in certain countries had found that if they broke the law then the Holy See would amend the law to conform with their disobedience. Liberals in other countries presumed that, if they followed suit, the Vatican would continue to surrender. Their judgment was correct, and not simply as regards Communion in the hand. (See Appendix 2, 3, & 4)

### 3. ARGUMENTS IN FAVOR OF COMMUNION IN THE HAND

- a. CIH was common practice in the early Church
  - i. Ancient form of Holy Communion was nothing like CIH today
- b. CIH will increase respect, reverence, and devotion for the Blessed Sacrament
- c. CIH Correct misperception that the Ordained Priest is more worthy to touch the Blessed Sacrament
- d. CIH while standing is psychologically more adult since the communicant feeds himself instead of being fed by the Ordained Priest
- e. Jesus said, "Take and Eat"
- f. CIH is faster

### 4. ARGUMENTS IN OPPOSITION TO COMMUNION IN THE HAND

- a. CIH is a Rupture from the Church Tradition
- b. CIH has not been sanctioned by any Church Council
- c. CIH has been condemned by at least 5 Church Councils
- d. CIH has resulted in a weakened faith in Christ's Real Presence in the Eucharist
- e. CIH has resulted in a weakened understanding of distinction of the Ordained Priesthood
- f. CIH has resulted in an increased risk of Consecrated Host being dropped
- g. CIH has resulted in an increased risk of Consecrated Host being desecrated
- h. CIH has resulted in an overall neglect of the Particles of the Consecrated
  - i. Christ is truly present Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity, whole and entire, in each particle the Holy Eucharist
  - ii. In the Rubrics of the 1962 Missal, after the Consecration of the Eucharist the Priests holds his thumbs and fore-fingers until they can be properly purified.
- i. CIH requires on constantly moving line that has communicants constantly distracted away from any form of contemplation or reverence.
- j. Receiving Communion in the hand equates to giving communion to oneself.
- k. Connection to how we pray and what we believe (Lex orandi, lex credendi)

1. Speed of the Communion Line should not be a valid reason to change a 2,000 year old tradition.
5. SHAMEFUL ABUSES
- a. Some parishes have required communicants to stand for communion
  - b. Some parishes have denied communion to those kneeling
  - c. Some parishes have admonished First Communicants and their parents for even asking if they could receive kneeling and on the tongue.
  - d. Some parishes have told First Communicants that if they insisted on receiving Communion kneeling on the tongue, they would be excluded from the Sacrament.
  - e. Some parishes have gone even further and removed all kneelers from the church.
  - f. Some Bishops have disciplined priests who have allowed the traditional form of Communion.
  - g. Some Bishops/Pastors have smashed altar rails with sledge hammers
6. CHAMPIONS OF THE RESISTANCE
- a. The late Father John A. Hardon was a tireless Catholic writer. Some of his best-known books are the *Catholic Catechism*, the *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, and the *Treasury of Catholic Wisdom*. When Father Hardon addressed a Call to Holiness Conference on November 1, 1997 he answered a question from the audience concerning Communion-in-the-hand as follows: "Whatever you can do to stop Communion-in-the-hand will be blessed by God." Father Hardon also said: "Behind Communion-in-the-hand — I wish to repeat and make as plain as I can — is a weakening; a conscious and deliberate weakening of faith in the Real Presence."
  - b. New Vatican prefect praises traditional manner of receiving Holy Communion December 17, 2008  
During the interview, in which Cardinal Canizares Llovera is characterized as a man who combines commitment to principle with "exquisite tact and gentleness," the prefect said, "What does it mean to receive Communion in the mouth? What does it mean to kneel before the Most Holy Sacrament? What does it mean to kneel during the consecration at Mass? It means adoration, it means recognizing the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist; it means respect and an attitude of faith of a man who prostrates before God because he knows that everything comes from Him, and we feel speechless, dumbfounded, before the wondrousness, His goodness, and His mercy. That is why it is not the same to place the hand, and to receive Communion in any fashion, than doing it in a respectful way; it is not the same to receive Communion kneeling or standing up, because all these signs indicate a profound meaning. What we have to grasp is that profound attitude of the man who prostrates himself before God, and that is what the Pope wants."
7. WHAT CAN WE DO? (THE CHOICE IS OURS):
- a. Choose not to volunteer to be an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion

- b. Choose to only receive Communion from Ordained Priests
  - c. Choose to only receive Communion kneeling
  - d. Choose to only receive Communion on the tongue
  - e. If there is a real obstacle to any of these, choose not to receive Communion.
  - f. Write letters.
8. CONCLUSION:
- The following question was posed to Mother Teresa by Father George William Rutler: "Mother, what do you think is the worst problem in the world today?" She more than anyone could name any number of candidates: famine, plague, disease, the breakdown of the family, rebellion against God, the corruption of the media, world debt, nuclear threat, and so on. Without pausing a second she said, "Wherever I go in the whole world, the thing that makes me the saddest is watching people receive Communion in the hand."
- Fr. George William Rutler, Good Friday, 1989, Sermon at St. Agnes Church, New York City

# Appendix 1

Congregation de Cultu Divino et Disciplina Sacramentorum  
Prot. n. 1322/02/L  
Rome, 1 July 2002

Your Excellency,

This Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments has recently received reports of members of the faithful in your Diocese being refused Holy Communion unless while standing to receive, as opposed to kneeling. The reports state that such a policy has been announced to parishioners. There were possible indications that such a phenomenon might be somewhat more widespread in the Diocese, but the Congregation is unable to verify whether such is the case. This Dicastery is confident that Your Excellency will be in a position to make a more reliable determination of the matter, and these complaints in any event provide an occasion for the Congregation to communicate the manner in which it habitually addresses this matter, with a request that you make this position known to any priests who may be in need of being thus informed.

The Congregation in fact is concerned at the number of similar complaints that it has received in recent months from various places, and considers any refusal of Holy Communion to a member of the faithful on the basis of his or her kneeling posture to be a grave violation of one of the most basic rights of the Christian faithful, namely that of being assisted by their Pastors by means of the Sacraments (Codex Iuris Canonici, canon 213). In view of the law that "sacred ministers may not deny the sacraments to those who opportunely ask for them, are properly disposed and are not prohibited by law from receiving them" (canon 843 ¶ 1), there should be no such refusal to any Catholic who presents himself for Holy Communion at Mass, except in cases presenting a danger of grave scandal to other believers arising out of the person's unrepented public sin or obstinate heresy or schism, publicly professed or declared. Even where the Congregation has approved of legislation denoting standing as the posture for Holy Communion, in accordance with the adaptations permitted to the Conferences of Bishops by the Institutio Generalis Missalis Romani n. 160, paragraph 2, it has done so with the stipulation that communicants who choose to kneel are not to be denied Holy Communion on these grounds.

In fact, as His Eminence, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger has recently emphasized, the practice of kneeling for Holy Communion has in its favor a centuries-old tradition, and it is a particularly expressive sign of adoration, completely appropriate in light of the true, real and substantial presence of Our Lord Jesus Christ under the consecrated species.

Given the importance of this matter, the Congregation would request that Your Excellency inquire specifically whether this priest in fact has a regular practice of refusing Holy Communion to any member of the faithful in the circumstances described above and -- if the complaint is verified -- that you also firmly instruct him and any other priests who may have had such a practice to refrain from acting thus in the future. Priests should understand that the Congregation will regard future complaints of this nature with great seriousness, and if they are verified, it intends to seek disciplinary action consonant with the gravity of the pastoral abuse.

Thanking Your Excellency for your attention to this matter and relying on your kind collaboration in its regard,

Sincerely yours in Christ,  
Jorge A. Cardinal Medina Estévez  
Prefect

# Appendix 2

# St. Petersburg Times

November 18, 1977



**Two choices at communion: tongue or hand**

By JAN KIRBY  
Religion Editor

CLEARWATER — Catholic worshippers throughout the United States will be able to choose starting Saturday how they want to receive Holy Communion. They will be able to have the priest place the consecrated wafer in the hand or on the tongue, as has been the custom.

Permission to allow the option was given by the Vatican June 17, 1977 at the request of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. It already was available in 80 countries on five continents.

According to Father Andrews of St. Cecilia Church in Clearwater, "Our bishops believe that receiving Communion in the hand will serve to increase the respect, the reverence and the devotion of the Catholic people for the Blessed Sacrament and better fulfill the invitation of our Lord to 'Take and eat' His body (Matthew 26:26)."

THE PROPER procedure for Communion in the hand will be explained in all Catholic churches in the Pinellas area during the next few weeks. Many winter visitors, especially those from Canada, have been instructed and are already using this method of receiving Communion.

It was during the 9th Century that the practice of receiving Communion directly on the tongue became universally accepted. A study presented to the bishops stated that the current practice developed during a period of rising distinction between clergy and laymen.

"WORSHIPPERS TOOK on an exaggerated feeling of unworthiness," the study said. "Mortal, sinful man, it was felt, dare not touch with his hands the all-holy ... unless he was ordained and his hands consecrated."

The study also suggested that receiving the wafer in the hand is "psychologically more adult," since the communicant feeds himself instead of being fed by the clergy.

Pinellas Times — DAVE PERSON

Father Andrews places a wafer in a communicant's hand.

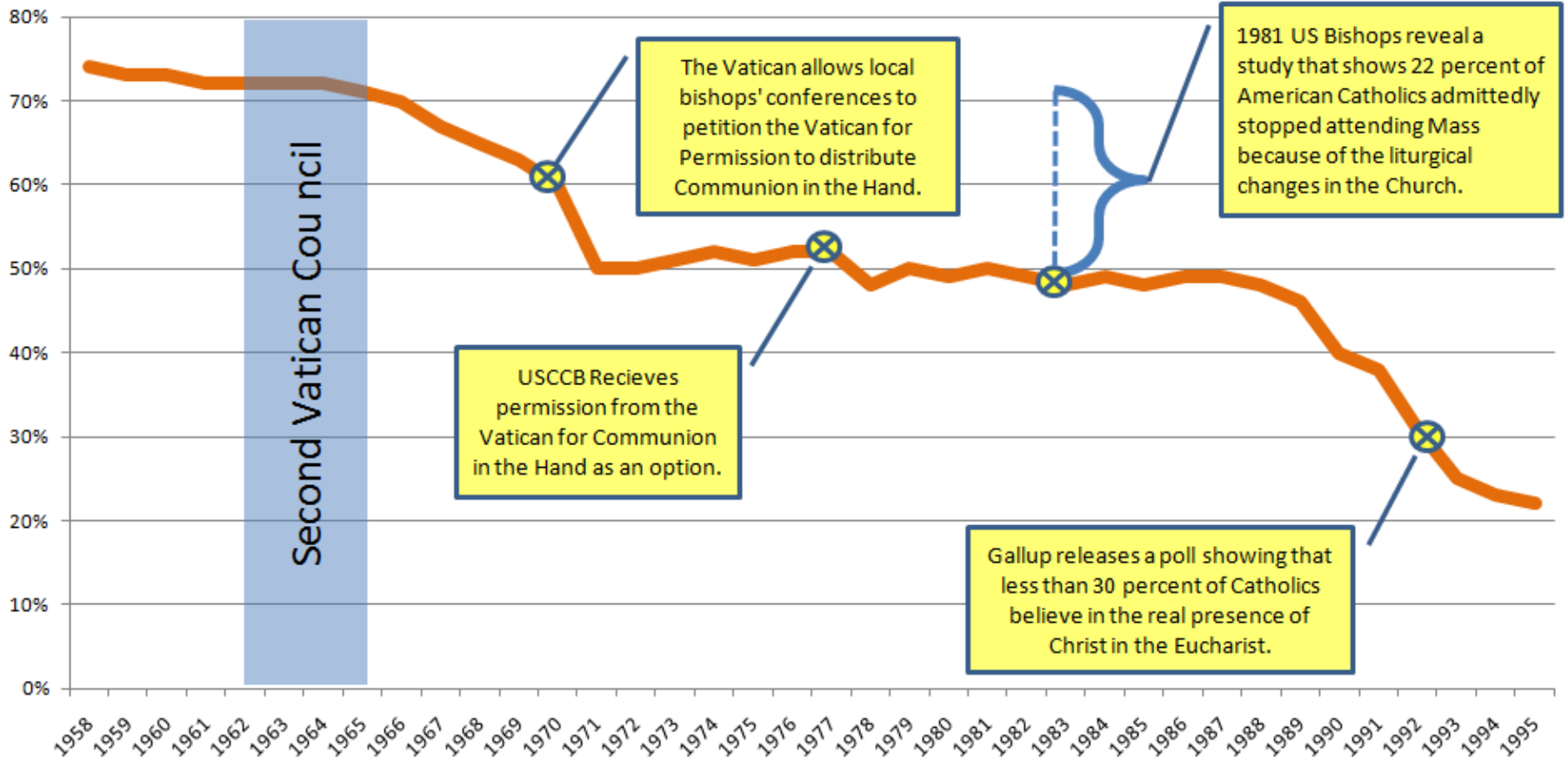
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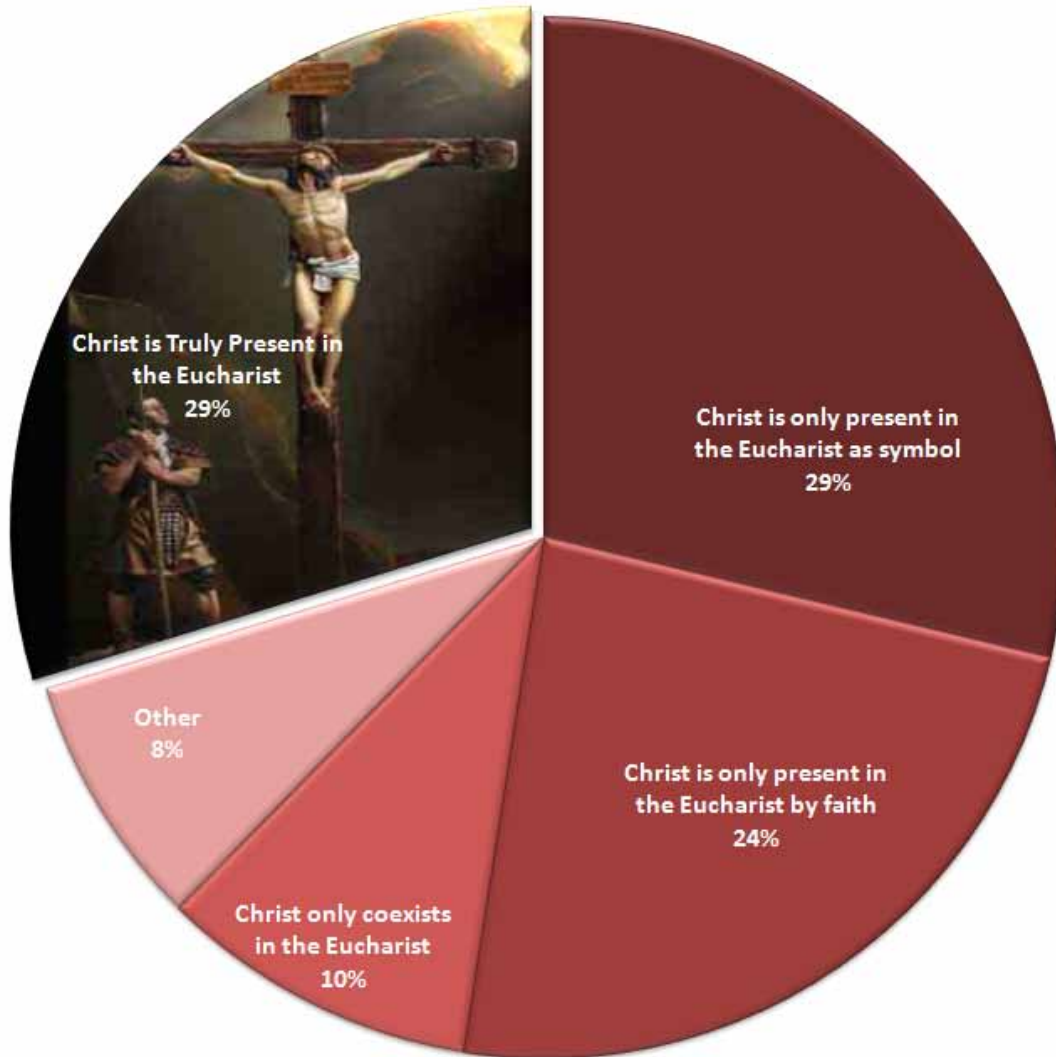
# Appendix 3

## Mass Attendance Among US Catholics 1958-1995



# Appendix 4

## 1992 Gallup Poll of US Catholics Adherence to Catholic Dogma



### Data Tabs:

1) 29% of US Catholics believe that when receiving Holy Communion, they are receiving bread and wine, which symbolize the spirit and teachings of Jesus Christ, and in so doing are expressing their attachment to His Person and words. This is the heresy of Protestant John Zwingli, who taught the false doctrine that the Mass is merely a symbolic commemoration of Christ's death.

2) 24% of US Catholics believe that when receiving Holy Communion, they are receiving the Body and Blood of Christ, which has become that because of their personal belief. This is the heresy of Protestant John Calvin, who taught the false doctrine that the faith of the recipient transforms the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ.

3) 10% of US Catholics believe that when receiving Holy Communion, they are receiving bread and wine, in which Jesus Christ is really and truly present. This is the heresy of Protestant Martin Luther, who taught the false doctrine known as "consubstantiation," that the Body and Blood of Christ coexist with the elements of bread and wine during the Eucharist.

4) 8% of US Catholics hold some other non-Catholic belief.

5) Only 30% of US Catholics believe that they are really and truly receiving the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ under the appearance of Bread and Wine. This has always been the Church's dogma regarding the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.

The Catholic Church teaches that Transubstantiation, that is, the complete change of the bread and wine into the substance of Christ's Body and Blood, is effected by an ordained priest during the Consecration of the Mass, so that only the appearance of bread and wine remain. The Sacramental presence of Christ begins the moment of transubstantiation and remains as long as the Eucharistic species exist. This doctrine goes back to Apostolic times, and its basis is in Scripture and Tradition. The term "transubstantiation," meaning "change of substance," was adopted by the dogmatic Fourth Lateran Ecumenical Council in 1215 to help explain the doctrine of the Real Presence.

The poll results show a terrible confusion on the part of Catholics concerning one of the most fundamental dogmata of the Church, a confusion that has actually led many into heresy.