

# Come Not to That Holy Table

## by the Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss, Sr.

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### Introduction

The Lord does not close the door on any man. When we are in evil states, it seems that He is not willing to listen if we call, and the Old Testament appears to support this. "Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity . . . when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood" (Isaiah 1:4,15). Yet that is said of our state, not of the Lord's willingness to listen; and it is said of the false blessings for which we might ask, not of the gifts, which He continues to offer us.

From the moment of a man's birth, through to the end of his life, the Divine providence is unceasing to lift us from the hells to which we may incline (*Divine Providence* 332-337). There is no second of our lives when the Lord will not hear, if we turn to Him in prayer for genuine aid; no time at which we might think that, because of our sins, the avenue of approach to Him is closed.

The Holy Supper, however, is a most special approach to the Lord. It is an act of worship it is true, and therefore is a communication with the Lord in the same spirit that prayer is, but because it is the most holy act of worship, there are states in which man is warned not to draw near and partake of it. It seems useful to set out the teachings as to when we may come and when we may not, that our use of this universal gate into heaven may be that which the Lord intends.

### The Times When a Man Ought to Come

#### 1. *When he is worthy*

"By the regenerate, who come to the holy supper worthily, those are meant who are in the three essentials of the church and heaven interiorly" (*True Christian Religion* 723; cf. 722, 719, 720). The three essentials are the acknowledgment of God, charity, and faith. The term "the worthy" applies always to those in good. Those who eat and drink worthily, and appropriate eternal life, are those with whom good forms the internal man, and "are in general an image of heaven, consequently an image of the Lord" (*Arcana Coelestia* 3513:2). Elsewhere we are told that all worthiness is from conjunction with the Lord (*Apocalypse Revealed* 167).

A man who has good within him receives the primary benefits of the Holy Supper, which are conjunction with the Lord, and introduction into heaven. We call these the primary benefits, not because that term is used, but because they are the most strongly emphasized uses of the sacrament, especially in the doctrinal treatments on the subject (*New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine* 210, 213; *True Christian Religion* 711ff; *Divine Providence* 122; *Arcana Coelestia* 4904, 2811, 4692, 4724, 4735). The particular power of the Holy Supper lies in the fact that nowhere is the mind kept so fully on the Divine Human of the Lord, and on the love which is the essence of that visible God, as in the sacrament of His flesh and blood (*Divine Providence* 122; *Arcana Coelestia* 4904); and only in His Divine Human can the Lord truly be (*Arcana Coelestia* 2811, 4692, 4724).

"This do in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22:19). "[The Lord] enjoined worshipped. . . the Holy Supper, that by it might be remembered the Lord, and His love toward the whole human race, and the reciprocal love of man to Him (*Arcana Coelestia* 4904).

Many people have wondered how a person may know if he is "worthy" to take the Holy Supper, and if he is, whether he would dare to come to it thinking, not of repentance, but of conjunction with the Lord, and entrance into heaven as the purpose. This is not the place to enter deeply into the question of how far we may know our spiritual state, but certain points are cogent.

If a man is conducting detailed self-examination prior to the Holy Supper, he is able to discover good states in himself as well as evil ones. Although it is possible that a good state may contain an evil internal, there are teachings which say that a man should be able to tell whether they are genuinely good states or not.

Firstly, he is told to examine his life, not when in the company of others, but when alone, in his own home, for then he sees what he is, not what he wishes others to think he is (*Divine Providence* 61, 104, 261; *Divine Love and Wisdom* 397, 418). Then, if he examines, not his behavior, but his end, the thing he loves and has in view, he may see what the quality of his life is (*Arcana Coelestia* 1909, 3796, 2982, 1317, 5159; cf. *Arcana Coelestia* 4307; *Heaven and Hell* 487; *Arcana Coelestia* 1102). It is possible for him in such an examination to discover that he has delight in use separate from self, as opposed to use for the sake of praise and self-glory (*Arcana Coelestia* 3796). He may find that he has a genuine regard for the neighbor, or his country, or the Lord's kingdom, or especially the Lord, in which case "he may know that his life is a heavenly one" (*Arcana Coelestia* 1909). This, we assume, would only be sensed in a most humble state, and by a most regenerate man. He may find that he has goodwill toward the neighbor, and pity for those in misery, especially for those in error in regard to doctrine; then he may know that there are internal things in him through which the Lord is working (*Arcana Coelestia* 1102). Perhaps he will look back on evils he has formerly loved, and find that he now abhors them; this is a definite sign of progress (*Arcana Coelestia* 9014; 5; cf. *Arcana Coelestia* 7918). In all these examinations a knowledge of correspondence helps to sense what his life will be here and hereafter, although they are not the key—the examination of the end unlocks the secrets of his ruling love (*Heaven and Hell* 487).

In the self-examination that should at times precede the Holy Supper, therefore, it seems that a good man must see signs of goodness which are a source of gratitude and encouragement. Even though the evil also think themselves good (*Ibid.*), their thought is of a far different character. A good man will have humility and a wish to serve. He will have a sense of holiness in the presence of the love for others which he feels within him. More than these, he will know in his heart that any good found in him is from the Lord; so his worship will be in innocence (*Arcana Coelestia* 3994).

Yet does he come, then, asking for conjunction and for heaven? Does he conclude that for him, repentance is no longer necessary? Surely not. Those who are far along the road to regeneration will examine themselves with a view to eliminating their evils, just as much as a less regenerate man will. They will know that the only obstacle to their doing the Lord's will better, is the presence of a proprium still somewhat active, and of evil not yet rejected, for no man is ever pure; even the angels examine themselves for evils and falsities (*Heaven and Hell* 487). A good man will approach the

Holy Supper, probably in the same spirit as he always has-looking to repentance and amendment of life (*Arcana Coelestia* 4217). Yet in his heart there is a love which is positive, which is asking for new strength when he takes the bread, and new understanding when he drinks the wine. He is seeking the living creative gifts of the Lord so that he may serve those he loves in his heart. This love is interior, not clearly recognized; yet it prays. Thus in his conscious mind he is asking forgiveness for evil, and for power to repent. In his heart he is also asking for the power and the light to love and to serve more fully. He receives an answer to both prayers-and heaven too.

## **2. Those who are repenting, or actively intending repentance**

Although it is the regenerate who is termed "the worthy," it is very clear from other teachings that there are others who should come to the sacrament, and who would not be considered unworthy.

Those who are repenting, actively combating their sin, are welcome, for they are becoming "worthy"; they are receiving the grace of Him who alone is truly worthy. Hence the teaching that the man who "looks to the Lord and performs repentance" is also conjoined with the Lord by the Holy Supper (*Apocalypse Revealed* 224).

Equally important is the use of the Holy Supper to initiate repentance. Here the Writings are speaking to the unregenerate. If a man is called to attend the Holy Supper, he ought to examine himself, see and recognize his evils, confess them before the Lord, ask for help, and then refrain from them and begin a new life. He is told to do this in connection with the Holy Supper, hence is it most rightly called a "sacrament of repentance" (*Apocalypse Revealed* 931; *True Christian Religion* 567; *Divine Providence* 265:2; *True Christian Religion* 530; *Divine Providence* 280).

What is noteworthy is that actual repentance is to follow the sacrament. The man is to approach the table, intending repentance, and "afterwards, when the sins, of which you have found yourselves guilty recur, then say to yourselves, 'We will not consent to these because they are sins against God.' This is actual repentance" (*Apocalypse Revealed* 531). Such repentance is said not to be severe, provided a man had not previously immersed himself in the delights of evil (*Doctrine of Life* 97; *Heaven and Hell* 533).

Surely, therefore, a man must not wait until he is worthy before partaking of the Holy Supper. It is only the presence of sin which is loved which renders a man unworthy (*Arcana Coelestia* 10208). When he comes with the desire to have sins made absent, then he is in the spirit of repentance. It was that "man in repenting" might look to the Lord alone that the Holy Supper was instituted; for only from the Lord in His Divine Human can the power to repent be granted (*Divine Providence* 122).

A man may be in a holy state, therefore, before he is regenerate. If he comes humbly, with knowledge and remorse for his sin, if, though the sin will still plague him, he intends to reject it, then his mind is turning towards the Lord. He is remembering His mercy, with hope of its bending towards him as he repents. He is remembering His will, that we should love Him as He has loved us, and love others the same way. He is aware of how far his life is from this, but hopes it will not be so in time to come because the bread of life, and the wine that maketh glad the heart of man will sustain him on the way. "Not unlike [the thoughts of the angels] are the thoughts of the man who is

in a holy state when receiving the bread of the Holy Supper; for he then thinks not of bread, but of the Lord and His mercy, and of what is of love to Him and of charity toward the neighbor, because he thinks of repentance and amendment of life" (*Arcana Coelestia* 4217).

### ***The Exhortation Read in the English Church***

In support of this last point, and leading into the next, is the exhortation read in the Church of England before the Holy Supper, which is quoted or cited at least twelve times in the Writings, always with the greatest approval. It is a beautiful piece of writing, but it is also, the Writings say, the "veritable Divine truth," (*Divine Providence* 114:4) and "true religion itself" (*Last Judgment* 214). Equally remarkable is the statement that "those who live according to the doctrine drawn from the above exhortations have spiritual faith, and after the life in the world come into heaven" (*Apocalypse Explained* 250:5).

This is the form of the exhortation quoted in the last-mentioned passage:

The way and means to be received as worthy partakers of that holy table is, first, to examine your lives and conversations by the rule of God's commandments; and whereinsoever ye shall perceive yourselves to have offended, either by will, word, or deed, there to bewail your own sinfulness, and to confess yourselves to Almighty God, with full purpose of amendment of life. And if ye shall perceive your offenses to be such as are not only against God but also against your neighbors, then ye shall reconcile yourselves unto them; being ready to make restitution and satisfaction according to the uttermost of your power, for all injuries and wrongs done by you to any other; and being likewise ready to forgive others that have offended you, as ye would have forgiveness of your offenses at God's hand; for otherwise the receiving of the Holy Communion doth nothing else but increase your damnation. Therefore if any of you be a blasphemer of God, a hinderer or slanderer of His Word, an adulterer, or be in malice or envy, or in any other grievous crime, repent ye of your sins, or else come not to that holy table; lest after the taking of that holy sacrament the devil enter into you, as he entered into Judas<sup>1</sup>, and fill you full of iniquities, and bring you to destruction both of body and soul.

Judge therefore yourselves, that ye be not judged of the Lord; repent ye truly for your sins past; have a lively and steadfast faith in Christ our Savior; amend your lives, and be in perfect charity with all men. Ye that do truly and earnestly repent of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbors, and intend to live a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking from henceforth in His holy ways, draw near with faith, and take this holy sacrament to your comfort, and make your humble confession to Almighty God.

Beautiful as the writing is in this exhortation, it is clearly a human piece of oratory, not a Divine one. It is not to the language that the Writings refer, in calling it the "veritable Divine truth," but to the spiritual truth contained within. Thus, when it is suggested that a man in repenting must "be in perfect charity with all men," we may recognize the language as pertaining to concepts of the former Christian Church. One cannot be in perfect charity, spiritual charity, immediately. Yet the

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<sup>1</sup> The reference to Judas is made because, according to the Gospel of Luke, Judas partook of the Holy Supper, and then went out to betray the Lord. See Luke 22: 14, 21-23, but compare Mark 14 and Matthew 26.

spirit speaks of the intention to be in perfect charity, and because of the intention, if it is pursued, what is wished becomes in time the reality.

What, then, is the doctrine from this exhortation which is the veritable Divine truth, and which, if followed, produces spiritual faith, and a door to heaven? The first part is very close to the pattern of genuine repentance set out in the *True Christian Religion* (*True Christian Religion* 567; *Apocalypse Revealed* 531). It adds, however, the concept of restitution to those we have offended or harmed, which is in accord with the story of Zaccheus the publican. He promised to repay fourfold any he had cheated, and of him the Lord said, "This day is salvation come to this house" (Luke 19: 1-10). Thus it makes the intention to repent and to make restitution the means to becoming worthy partakers of the Holy Supper. It is called, in the Writings, an exhortation "to be in charity by reconciliation and repentance" (*True Christian Religion* 722). Finally in this connection, we note the phraseology of that last section which makes it clear that the intention to live a new life is enough to begin with. "Ye that do truly and earnestly repent of your sins . . . and intend to live a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking from henceforth in His holy ways, draw near with faith, and take this holy sacrament to your comfort."

## Come not to that Holy Table

Now the warnings. To take the sacrament if one does not intend repentance does but increase one's damnation. Also, after taking it, the devil may enter into a man as it did into Judas, and fill him with iniquities and bring him to destruction of body and soul. The Writings support the exhortation in these points most directly (*Last Judgment* 214; *Spiritual Experiences* 5970. cf. *Divine Providence* 114; *True Christian Religion* 526), but other doctrines of the Writings also teach them.

### **1. If one is in sins of which repentance is not intended**

Let us not mistake this teaching. Some have said, or felt that they may not come to the Holy Supper because they have sinned in a particular way in the past. For example, a man who has committed adultery may feel that this act bars him from partaking for ever. More generally, a person may say, "I have done such and such an evil in the last few months. Therefore I cannot come."

That is not the teaching. No single act bars man from the sacrament, or from heaven! We are warned against coming, knowing full well that we are not intending repentance. Especially is this the case if a man knows from the truth what evil is – that is, when his intellectual apprehends the truth, but his will refuses to will the good. Then the conjunction of truth with evil is "profanation, and is meant by eating and drinking unworthily in the Holy Supper" (*Arcana Coelestia* 4601:3). Another passage speaks of the Holy Supper in connection with the teaching that "the holy things of the church are profaned by sins, because these remove them from what is Divine," (*Arcana Coelestia* 10208) and the Holy Supper is said to contain "such holiness that human minds are thereby conjoined with heavenly minds" (*Arcana Coelestia* 2177:8). Finally, there is the direct teaching that "it is known that those who eat the bread in the Holy Supper unworthily, do not appropriate good to themselves, but evil" (*Arcana Coelestia* 4745). "Then shall ye begin to say, Lord, we have eaten and drunk before Thee. But I will say to you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from Me, all ye workers of iniquity" (Luke 13:26, 27. See *True Christian Religion* 723).

It is interesting in this regard that prayers are also somewhat harmful if there is no intention of repentance with an evil man. Certainly they are not heard if a man remains in the delight of his Sin (*True Christian Religion* 329:4; *Arcana Coelestia* 4227:4; *Spiritual Experiences* 3678). They are also said "rather to confirm a man, for they make his conscience quiet under the idea that sins are remitted, provided one has deprecated evils, and used the means of salvation" (*Spiritual Experiences* 3677; cf. *Divine Providence* 280). In similar vein the Writings speak of those who were amongst the worst, who, "on the preceding evening and day, when they have gone to the supper, have abstained in externals from worldly things" (*Spiritual Experiences* 2777-2779). Afterwards, however, they behaved as wickedly as before. The attendance does harm to such people, for it causes them to be "secure so that thus they can live more securely and be confirmed in that very evil of life" (*Ibid.*) Such a person was President Stjerncrona, who lived a most wicked life, but perceived many truths, and practiced this mock repentance before the Holy Supper, thus using the sacrament for the show it presented to the world (*Spiritual Experiences* 4754).

### ***2. If there has been insufficient preparation***

It seems from all that has been said of the proper means of preparation for the Holy Supper that we must not come if we have neglected to prepare. It is not to be taken from custom; it is too important for that, and to do so induces on our minds a loss of the sense of its holiness.

At the same time, a word of caution is needed. It would appear justifiable from the teachings to believe that detailed self-examination is not needed every time one comes to the sacrament. That should take place once or twice a year (*True Christian Religion* 567); but, on the strength of that examination, and the intentions then formed, the sacrament may be taken with a more general preparation, at other times. Between the times of detailed examination, one may reflect on how far he has progressed in his intention, or pray for renewed help against the evil he is now continually fighting, or read and study during the week before, that new light may be gained. The point is that some preparation is necessary—at least, the whole thrust of the teachings seems to say so.

### ***3. If one does not acknowledge God***

This treatment cannot omit the statement concerning a man who at heart believes nothing, but attends church out of habit, and for the appearance. He profanes the Holy Supper by taking it, "for he sees the bread and wine with the eye, and tastes them with the tongue, while the thought of the mind is, 'What is this but a useless ceremony, and how do this bread and wine differ from that on my own table?'" (*True Christian Religion* 722). At times the hells breathe such thoughts into believers too, and this passage indicates the strong need to shun them.

### ***Doubtful Cases***

One can see from the doctrine the clear dividing line between those who intend repentance, and are going to undertake it, and those who do not intend to come face to face with their sin. But there are many who do not feel sure into which category they fall. They feel in their hearts that they have come to the Holy Supper, many times, intending to repent, and sincerely asking for help, and then they have slipped back into evil again. They have failed.

Have they profaned the Holy Supper? Should they not come in future, knowing from bitter experience how likely it is that they will give in once more? Perhaps these questions are at the core

of our doubts about approaching the sacrament. Here we enter the realm of judgment. Nevertheless it seems there are most compelling arguments for such people to attend the Holy Supper, and by no means to shun it.

The first reason is found in the purpose of the sacrament, and of prayer. The externals of the church exist to call to remembrance the need to worship God and obey His Word. They are not just for the chosen few, they are part of the outstretched arm of the merciful Lord, who came to call sinners to repentance. We do not wait until we have succeeded in our struggles before we may worship.

The teachings about who should not come are clearly meant for those who feel no remorse on account of their sin. They are for the man who does not intend repentance-not for him whose spirit is willing, but who is oppressed, and failing, because the flesh is weak. Where there is remorse, where there is guilt, where there is fear for eternal damnation, there is hope. If a person feels these when he thinks of his evils, he should try once more. He should examine his evil in the light of truth once more, see it for what it is, ask again for help, and approach the Holy Supper intending to try again. And if he fails again? He should come once more, and keep on coming, as long as he mourns by reason of his sin.

Consider the following teaching about a man who has chosen evil in young manhood – as is the case with “very many,” or “the majority,” at this time of life (Latin *plerusque*). “If therefore when a man betakes himself to evils, as is the case with very many in young manhood, he feels any anxiety when he reflects upon his having done what is evil, it is a sign that he will still receive influx through the angels from heaven, and it is also a sign that he will afterwards suffer himself to be reformed . . . for with those who are then in anxiety, there is an internal acknowledgment of evil, which when recalled by the Lord becomes confession, and finally repentance” (*Arcana Coelestia* 5470). Probably one of the greatest values of prayer and of the Holy Supper is that they, especially the sacrament, keep us anxious on account of our sins. Without this approach to the Lord, anxiety diminishes, and when it vanishes, “hope vanishes” (*Ibid.*).

Perhaps we may say a word about those who wonder if they should come if they happen to be in a bad mood at the time of the service. Often something happens, in the bustle of Sunday morning, or during the week before the service, which induces a negative state. Is it wrong to approach the Holy Supper, feeling that one is in a temper with one's wife, or children, or with a friend?

Ideally, the answer is, that one should guard against having the sacrament denied through such states. If they occur, however, and especially if we feel we were responsible for them in some way, then that is not the time to take the sacrament. The New Testament makes that clear. “Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to, thy brother, and then come, and offer thy gift” (Matthew 5: 23,24). Reconciliation, then worship! There is also the passage in the exhortation discussed above that urges us to be “ready to forgive others that have offended you, as ye would have forgiveness at God’s hand.” Perhaps in such a circumstance a private administration can be sought soon afterwards. Men and women must feel free to ask the priesthood for the sacrament at any time, if their personal needs require it.

## Conclusion

The common ingredient in all those who may approach the Holy Supper is an awareness of the evils of one's proprium. The man who is in spirit an angel sees his evils and falsities, as do the angels at times (*Heaven and Hell* 487). He knows that he has no good of his own, that without the Lord's presence all his good loves would flee away; and he knows that there is much in him that still binders the Lord's work. The penitent man comes in the determination to shun his sin. And the man who is trying to repent, but is weak, comes in states when examination and remorse have revealed to him anew the need to look to the Lord alone.

When the proprium is active, then there is no humility, and man profanes by what is his own. He comes to the sacrament while the delight of evil is not rejected, even in wish. He comes without the acknowledgment of the God he is supposed to worship. Or he comes when proprium has made him angry with others; then how can he be humble before the Lord? Whether the state is permanent or temporary, it is a state alien to the central purpose-that the Lord should be remembered, and His love, and our humble love for Him.

"Ye that do truly and earnestly repent of your sins ... draw near with faith, and take this holy sacrament to your comfort, and make your humble confession to Almighty God."