together about our lives of faith. Together, the Baptists and Catholics are like the woman who dared to touch the hem of Jesus's garment in her desperate pursuit of healing. We too seek healing for the long-standing disease of the Body—in this case the Body of Christ. Perhaps we can come to the table together with all due humility to touch the healing grace that is the promise and substance of the Eucharist to further Christ's work in restoring his Body for the life of the world.

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VI. Discerning the Questions

I want to begin by expressing my appreciation to Curtis Freeman for his comments. I have been reflecting on this topic since it was first mentioned as a possibility. What Freeman has offered serves us well as a beginning to this very important conversation. Hopefully, I can add to that beginning.

I want to provide a context for my remarks. Each year since I began attending the College Theology Society annual convention, I have attended Mass on Saturday night, processed toward the altar, crossed my arms, and received a blessing. I have also often done so when I attended midweek Mass during my time as a Baptist student in a Catholic doctoral program. Moreover, when I occasionally attend Mass at the parish adjacent to the Baptist university where I teach, I do the same and instruct any of my non-Catholic students who join me to do likewise. To be sure, the question of whether it is possible for me to do otherwise in one of these settings is a very pertinent one for me.

In response to the proposal by Freeman, I think it best to offer several questions. They are pragmatic, theological, and perhaps a bit existential.

First, what is the goal here? Are we looking to have a onetime occasion for shared communion or a more regular practice? Each can do important ecumenical work and therefore is worth pursuing. When the first Baptist World Congress met in London in 1905, Alexander Maclaren asked those gathered to recite the Apostles' Creed. They did so as a signal to the rest of the

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https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2018.79 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Christian world that Baptists shared in the same faith as the rest of the church catholic. Even though this practice was not repeated at later gatherings, with the exception of the centennial congress in 2005, a significant ecumenical moment had occurred nonetheless. Likewise, the shape of the articulated goal raises additional questions. For instance, Freeman has laid out a path by which the onetime event could happen; but what happens the following year? It seems that the favorable conditions in one geographic location might not apply once this meeting moves to another place. How might the effect of this change of locale be received? Will that cause more friction between CTS and local ordinaries? Moreover, if a more regular practice is established, could that still be described as *extraordinary* communion?

Second, while Freeman focused on the possibility of sharing in communion, I want to ask, is there any ecumenical import to the regular practice of processing toward the altar and receiving the blessing? As many CTS attendees know, many Baptists would be appalled that I and my fellow Baptists attend Mass and join the procession at all. They would think that E. Y. Mullins—a twentieth-century Baptist luminary who railed against such "religion by proxy"—was rolling over in his grave.[92] As Freeman mentioned, Avery Dulles counseled "penitent abstention" as an important sign of church disunity. But is it possible that this action also points to a deep, even if imperfect, form of communion? For instance, does it stand as an affirmation by Baptists that the church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church?[93] Might it be possible that Baptists—precisely through their abstention—are bearing witness to the truth of this claim? And how do our answers to these questions frame and reframe the possibility of intercommunion?

Finally, I was glad Freeman referred to Paul's correction of eucharistic practice in his first letter to the Corinthians. In this text, I always gravitate to the phrase "discern the body" (1 Cor 11:29). Of course, one of the Corinthians' problems was factions within the community, and the apostle's response seems subtly echoed in that famous de Lubacian line: "The Eucharist makes the church."[94] But this leads me to ask, where is the body that Baptists are to discern? This is, of course, an ecclesiological question, and one that is bigger than the scope of the response to Freeman's proposal.

[92] E. Y. Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion: A New Interpretation of the Baptist Faith* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1908), 54.

[93] Pope Paul VI, Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, November 21, 1964, §8, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

[94] Henri de Lubac, SJ, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, trans. Gemma Simmonds, CJ, with Richard Price and Christopher Stephens (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 88.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2018.79 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Still, setting aside the question of shared eucharistic faith (because the Baptists meeting at CTS likely exhibit serious congruence with Catholics on that count), a lack of a shared embodied sense of apostolicity within the ordained ministry of the church contributes to an ecclesiological chasm that exists between Baptists and Catholics. With this in mind, what does intercommunion say about our Baptist congregations? Does it tie them more closely to the church catholic (and Catholic)? Does it leave them behind entirely (in which case, we should wonder how intercommunion is different from communion after reception into the Catholic Church)? Or does it have no bearing on them at all (which might be the most troubling conclusion of all)?

Overall, I should say that I am not sure what I think about Freeman's proposal (or even the answers to my own questions). I do not know if we can intercommune without breaking the rules, or whether some rule-breaking is helpful and/or necessary. However, I do want to think around this subject together. Regardless of where we fall on this question, it seems to me that this conversation draws from the deep sense of *koinonia* that I and other Baptists have felt with Catholics at the College Theology Society over more than twenty years. With hope, whatever comes next will further strengthen that fellowship and communion.

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https://doi.org/10.1017/hor.2018.79 Published online by Cambridge University Press