

The Communion Fast: A Reconsideration

Edward N. Peters

The liturgical renewal movement that preceded the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) has been repeatedly and authoritatively recognized as a movement of the Holy Spirit in the Church.¹ Deficiencies in the post-conciliar implementation of liturgical renewal must not be allowed to obscure recognition of the great good that has been accomplished over the last century by bringing the worship of God closer to the center of Christian life.²

1 The Council itself made this assertion in its constitution on the liturgy, *Sacrosanctum concilium*, when it stated: "Zeal for the promotion and restoration of the sacred liturgy is rightly held to be a sign of the providential dispositions of God in our time, as a movement of the Holy Spirit in his Church." Second Vatican Council, *Constitutio de Sacra Liturgia Sacrosanctum Concilium* (4 December 1963) 43, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* [henceforth AAS] 56 (1964) 97-138, at 112, or *Constitutiones, Decreta, Declarationes* (Vatican City: Vatican Polyglot Press, 1966) 3-69, at 25-26; trans. A. Flannery, *Vatican Council II*, vol. 1, *The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, new revised ed. (New York: Costello/Dominican, 1996) 1-39, at 15. Just a few years earlier, Pope Pius XII addressing the International Congress of Pastoral Liturgy (1956) had observed: "The liturgical movement is thus shown forth as a sign of the providential dispositions of God for the present time, of the movement of the Holy Ghost in the Church, to draw men more closely to the mysteries of the faith and the riches of grace which flow from the active participation of the faithful in the liturgical life." Pope Pius XII, Allocution "*Vous Nous avez demandé*" (22 September 1956), AAS 48 (1956) 711-25, at 712, trans. *The Assisi Papers: Proceedings of the First International Congress of Pastoral Liturgy*, (Collegetown MN: Liturgical Press, 1957) 223-36, at 224. Twenty-five years after the Council, Pope John Paul II reiterated this theme, saying: "[W]e should give thanks to God for that movement of the Holy Spirit in the Church which the liturgical renewal represents." Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Vicesimus quintus annus* (4 December 1988), AAS 81 (1989) 897-918, at 909, n. 12, trans. <www.vatican.va>.

2 See John Paul II, *Vicesimus quintus annus*, 12. The literature discussing post-conciliar problems in liturgical practice is vast but not always balanced. For brief, measured statements of the issues, see, besides *Vicesimus quintus annus* 11 and 13, "The Oxford Declaration" as adopted in 1996 by the Liturgy Forum of the Centre for Faith and Culture, available in Peter Elliott, *Liturgical Question Box* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1998) 187-89.

One of the principal goals of the liturgical renewal movement has been to increase the frequency of the reception of the Eucharist by the faithful especially at Mass.³ To achieve this worthy aim, two methods were employed: first, renewed catechesis about the importance of frequent reception of the Eucharist; second, mitigation of disciplinary restrictions on the reception of holy communion, principally by shortening the eucharistic fast. The soundness of the first method needs no demonstration; but the second, culminating in the *de facto* elimination of the eucharistic fast, may be another matter. Given that some forty years have now elapsed since the eucharistic fast was reduced by Pope Paul VI to its present one-hour period,⁴ it seems possible to ask, first, whether the *de facto* elimination of the eucharistic fast has contributed to the faithful's fruitful participation in the Eucharist and, second, even if it has so contributed, whether it has introduced other pastoral problems in its wake. Depending on the answers to these two questions, one might be led to consider "re-forming the reform" in this area for the better pursuit of the original goal of augmenting the faithful's ability to participate frequently and worthily in the Eucharist.

CURRENT LAW ON THE EUCHARISTIC FAST

The present discipline on the eucharistic fast is contained in canon 919 § 1 of the Johanno-Pauline Code of Canon Law: "A person who is to receive the Most Holy Eucharist is to abstain for at least one hour before holy communion from any food and drink, except for

3 See, for example, *Sacrosanctum concilium*, 55; Pius Parsch, *The Liturgy of the Mass*, 3rd ed., trans. H. E. Winstone (London/St Louis: Herder, 1957) 22-23 and 35; and Lancelot Sheppard (ed.), *The People Worship: A History of the Liturgical Movement* (New York: Hawthorn, 1967) 99-115, 105. One can trace the modern papal encouragement of frequent eucharistic reception to Pope St Pius X. See *Sacrae Congregationis Concilii Decretum Sacra Tridentina synodus* (20 December 1905), AAS 2 (1910) 894-98 and *idem*, *Decretum Post editum* (7 December 1906), AAS 2 (1910) 898.

The zeal with which some liturgical reformers called for an increase in lay reception of the Eucharist at Mass elicited reproval by Pope Pius XII, although not in a way that questioned the trend toward or desirability of greater congregational reception of communion during Mass: "The august sacrifice of the altar is concluded with communion or the partaking of the divine feast. But, as all know, the integrity of the sacrifice only requires that the priest partake of the heavenly food. Although *it is most desirable that the people should also approach the holy table*, this is not required for the integrity of the sacrifice." Pope Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Mediator Dei* (20 November 1947), AAS 39 (1947) 521-600, at 562, trans. <www.vatican.va>, emphasis added.

4 See note 26 below.

only water and medicine.”⁵ No commentator treating this canon sees any ambiguity in its terms. The norm is unambiguous and has been so since it first entered ecclesiastical discipline in 1964 by order of Pope Paul VI.⁶ But it might still be problematic. How so?

First, it is an exercise in rank legalism to consider abstinence from food and drink for an hour as any kind of “fast,” let alone as one intended to help prepare for the inestimable event that is the reception of the Eucharist. Even a moderate meal cannot be digested in one hour;⁷ in normal cases hunger does not set in for several hours after eating.⁸ For practical purposes, then, most people perceive no “fasting” within one hour of eating and drinking, and indeed, most could continue eating and drinking until walking out the door for Mass yet still manage to “fast” for an hour before communion time at a Sunday Mass. Pointless observances should not be the subject of legislation lest contempt for the law arise.⁹

Second, because the fasting “norm” can be satisfied with virtually no advertence on the part of its subjects, the current law might be a disincentive to the faithful in regard to augmenting their disposition

5 1983 CIC 919. § 1: “Sanctissimam Eucharistiam recepturus per spatium saltem unius horae ante sacram communionem absteineat a quocumque cibo et potu, excepta tantummodo aqua atque medicina.” Text and translations of the Johanno-Pauline Code [1983 CIC] from *Codex Iuris Canonici, auctoritate Ioannis Pauli PP. II promulgatus*, published in AAS 75/2 (1983) 1-320, as corrected and amended; trans. Canon Law Society of America, *Code of Canon Law, Latin-English Edition*, new English translation (Washington DC: Canon Law Society of America, 1999).

6 See note 26 below.

7 Charles B. Clayman (ed.), *The American Medical Association Family Medical Guide*, 3rd ed. (New York: Random House, 1994) 496: “It takes at least 3 to 5 hours for the contents of a meal to reach the lower parts of the small intestine and leave the stomach and duodenum empty.” Similarly, Charles B. Clayman (ed.), *The American Medical Association Encyclopedia of Medicine* (New York: Random House, 1989) 360: “Time Scale: the approximate period food spends in each part of the digestive system ... Stomach, 2-4 hours; Small intestine, 1-4 hours.”

8 Clayman, *Medical Association Encyclopedia*, 548: “Hunger occurs when *the stomach is empty* and blood sugar level is low,” emphasis added. It can be seen that, under normal conditions, the sensation of hunger does not set in for 3 to 8 hours after eating.

9 The “15-minute fast” for some sick persons in effect from 1973 to 1983 was perhaps the most striking example of a purposeless norm in this area. See Congregation for the Discipline of the Sacraments, Instruction *Immensae caritatis* (29 January 1973), AAS 65 (1973) 264-71, at 269; trans. Canon Law Digest [henceforth CLD] VIII:477-85, at 483. Fortunately, the Johanno-Pauline Code eliminates this variation on the eucharistic fast.

for the reception of the Eucharist. Quite simply, the faithful probably feel that “observance” of the now negligible law of fast is adequate preparation for reception of the Eucharist. Worse, the one-hour “fast” might contribute to a climate wherein the sacrilegious reception of the Eucharist is made more likely. That these and other points might be better shown, however, a brief review of the discipline of the eucharistic fast is in order.

OVERVIEW OF THE EUCHARISTIC FAST

Beginning not later than the third century and continuing until midway through the twentieth (that is, for over 1,700 years) an onerous fast was imposed on priests and people intending to receive the Eucharist.¹⁰ As Thomas F. Anglin put it, “The law of the Eucharistic fast, while a purely ecclesiastical law, oblige[d] with a severity unknown in any other purely ecclesiastical discipline, not involving validity.”¹¹ In general, the eucharistic fast was reckoned from midnight, but evidence of fasts beginning as early as sundown the previous day or as late as “cock-crow” on the day of intended reception can be found. Variations in what was expected to be refrained from existed, but, as a rule, the notion of fast was stringent; prohibitions even of water and medicine were common.¹² Exceptions from the discipline were few,¹³

10 See generally Thomas F. Anglin, *The Eucharistic Fast: An Historical Synopsis and Commentary*, Canon Law Studies 124 (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1941) esp. 3-56; and James Ruddy, *The Apostolic Constitution Christus Dominus: Text, Translation, and Commentary with Short Annotations on the Motu Proprio Sacram Communionem*, Canon Law Studies 390 (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1957) 35-37. Our knowledge of the eucharistic fasting discipline of the primitive Church is shrouded by uncertainties regarding the relationship between the Eucharist and the ancient *agape* meal, but it is unlikely that fasting was required prior to reception of the Eucharist in the earliest days of the Church. See, for example, Aidan Carr, “Fast, Eucharistic,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 5 (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967) 847. Fasting was certainly not required at the Last Supper (Mt 26:26; Mk 14:22; Lk 22:20).

11 Anglin, *Eucharistic Fast*, 165.

12 The “natural” fast associated with the Eucharist, and the so-called “ecclesiastical” fast associated with penitential times, differ greatly from each other, the natural or eucharistic fast being much stricter than the ecclesiastical. See generally J. D. O’Neill, “Fast,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 5 (New York: Gilmar Society, 1913) 789-91; and idem, “The Black Fast,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 2 (New York: Gilmar Society, 1913) 590.

13 For example, under very limited conditions, the chronically sick (itself a term narrowly construed then to exclude the injured) could receive the Eucharist without observing a natural fast on occasion. See

while penalties for receiving the Eucharist without having observed a fast were strict, up to and including excommunication.¹⁴

With the promulgation of the Pio-Benedictine Code,¹⁵ specifically canons 808¹⁶ and 858,¹⁷ the eucharistic fasting requirements were codified near their zenith: basically, all healthy persons, priests and people alike, intending to receive the Eucharist, were required to fast from everything, including water, from midnight. Two main points stand out here:¹⁸ first, this eucharistic fast had a fixed *terminus*

Anglin, *Eucharistic Fast*, 118-40. Consumption of the Eucharist to avoid its desecration was and is always permitted. See Anglin, *Eucharistic Fast*, 42 and 54-55, and Felix Cappello (1879-1962), *Tractatus canonico-moralis de sacramentis iuxta Codicem juris canonici*, vol. 1, 7th ed. (Turin: Marietti, 1962) 408, n. 484.

14 See Anglin, *Eucharistic Fast*, 157. Under Pio-Benedictine law, priests who failed to fast before celebrating Mass were subject to *ferendae sententiae* suspension per canon 2321. There are no penalties associated with the eucharistic fast under the Johanno-Pauline Code.

15 *Codex Iuris Canonici, Pii X Pontificis Maximi iussu digestus Benedicti Papae XV auctoritate promulgatus, Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 9/2 (1917) 3-521, [henceforth 1917 CIC]; all English translations of the 1917 Code are from Edward Peters, *The 1917 or Pio-Benedictine Code of Canon Law in English Translation with Extensive Scholarly Apparatus* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2000).

16 1917 CIC 808. Sacerdoti celebrare ne liceat, nisi ieiunio naturali a media nocte servato. *English translation*: It is not licit for a priest to celebrate without having observed a natural fast from midnight.

17 1917 CIC 858: “§ 1 Qui a media nocte ieiunium naturale non servaverit, nequit ad sanctissimam Eucharistiam admitti, nisi mortis urgeat periculum, aut necessitas impediendi irreverentiam in sacramentum. § 2. Infirmi tamen qui iam a mense decumbunt sine certa spe ut cito convalescant, de prudenti confessarii consilio sanctissimam Eucharistiam sumere possunt semel aut bis in hebdomada, etsi aliquam medicinam vel aliquid per modum potus antea sumpserint.” *English translation*: “§ 1. Whoever has not observed a natural fast from midnight cannot be admitted to the most holy Eucharist, unless danger of death urges, or it is necessary to avoid irreverence toward the sacrament. § 2. Those who have been sick lying down for a month, however, without a certain hope of a speedy recovery, with the prudent advice of a confessor, can take the most holy Eucharist once or twice in a week even if beforehand they have taken some medicine or some liquid as a drink.”

18 There is no purpose served today by rehearsing the minutiae into which some authors descended in discussing these simple rules. Those needing to know, for example, why swallowing cotton thread broke the fast but silken thread did not, how the type of oil that lubricated a stomach pump impacted the fast, or the degree to which one’s intention in swallowing a snowflake was important, should consult Anglin, *Eucharistic Fast*, esp. 59-76.

a quo (namely, midnight) regardless of when one expected to receive communion (the *terminus ad quem*);¹⁹ second, the eucharistic fast was the same for celebrants and congregation.

The strict tone of such legislation, however, if it was ever justified,²⁰ could not survive the exigencies of industrialist and commercial societies where the rising and setting of the sun no longer dominated daily life. Soon after the promulgation of the 1917 Code, small and uncoordinated concessions were made to the real conditions under which priests and people alike sought to partake of the Eucharist.²¹ These accommodations came by way of individual dispensations from universal law and in the form of limited indulgences to be applied by local ordinaries. But the rhythms of modern life, the interest in reception of the Eucharist at Mass inspired by the liturgical renewal movement and, some suggest,²² a growing awareness on the part of the Holy See that indifference to Our Lord's eucharistic presence was part of a wider secularizing trend in society, were steadily mounting pressure for a complete reform of the eucharistic fast.

19 Note that under Pio-Benedictine law (1917 CIC 821 § 1) Mass could not begin later than one hour after noon, a norm that in practice limited the eucharistic fast to a maximum of 13 or 14 hours, although such "late" Masses (9 a.m. or later) were very unusual. In any case, this restriction on Mass times has been basically removed by 1983 CIC 931.

20 All authors concede, for example, that the discipline of the eucharistic fast is ecclesiastical in origin. See, for example, Anglin, *Eucharistic Fast*, 3 and 165; Ruddy, *Apostolic Constitution*, 35; and Carr, "Fast," 847. Cappello considered the fast likely to be of apostolic origin. See Felix Cappello (1879-1962), *Tractatus canonico-moralis de sacramentis iuxta Codicem juris canonici*, vol. 1, 7th ed. (Turin: Marietti, 1962) 379-80, n. 447, and 385, n. 458. John Huels refers to the eucharistic fast as "custom" in his commentary on 1983 CIC 919, in *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*, ed. John P. Beal, et al. (New York: Paulist Press, 2000) 1113.

21 The "piece-meal" character of these solutions can be gleaned by reviewing cases recorded in CLD, esp. vols I-III (covering the 1917-1953), wherein under 1917 CIC 808 and 858 especially, some relaxation of the eucharistic fast was provided to, among others, binating or trinating priests, Russians attending afternoon or evening Mass, people working in defense plants, the sick in hospitals, the sick at home, night workers, the destitute in post-war France, and mariners using American ports.

22 Ruddy, *Apostolic Constitution*, 114, wherein: "Undoubtedly the Holy Father had another reason [for promulgating *Sacram communionem*], which he did not mention. During the last century an ever-growing tide of materialism has threatened to engulf the Church. This tide can be stemmed only by greater devotion to Christ in the Eucharist, which can be shown in no better way than by the frequent and daily reception of the Eucharist on the part of the faithful."

The first of the two great stages in the reform, and *de facto* abolition, of the eucharistic fast came, as it happened, in two successive parts under Pope Pius XII: in his apostolic constitution *Christus Dominus* (1953),²³ and his *motu proprio Sacram communionem* (1957).²⁴ Together these two documents radically altered the eucharistic fast.²⁵ Their combined effect was as follows.

First, while previously the eucharistic fast had been observed from a fixed *terminus a quo* (namely, midnight), henceforth the fast would know only a *terminus ad quem* (namely, reception of the Eucharist) such that the observance of the fast was to be reckoned backward from the time communion was expected to be received, instead of being observed forward from a fixed hour. Second, the fasting period was fixed at three hours for solid foods and one hour for liquids, except that alcoholic beverages were entirely forbidden during the fast, while water or medicines did not break the fast. Third, the pope distinguished between celebrants, who needed to complete their fast prior to the start of Mass, and people, who needed to complete their fast only prior to the actual reception of communion. No one disputes that Pius' two reforms had a dramatic impact on the number of the faithful approaching the Eucharist, especially in Mass.

The second major stage in the reorganization of the eucharistic fast came, as noted above, under Pope Paul VI, who, while leaving the *terminus ad quem* as decisive, shortened it to the wholly negligible one-hour we know today.²⁶ At the same time, the pope eliminated the

23 Pope Pius XII, Apostolic Constitution *Christus Dominus* (6 January 1953), AAS 45 (1953) 15-24, trans. CLD IV:269-277, and in Ruddy, *Apostolic Constitution*, 2-19, Latin-English facing pages. Atypically, an Italian translation of the constitution was provided immediately in AAS 45 (1953) 25-32. Also, the Congregation for the Holy Office presented an instruction on *Christus Dominus* concomitantly with the constitution's promulgation. See Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office, *Instructio de disciplina circa ieiunium eucharisticum servanda*, AAS 45 (1953) 47-51, trans. CLD IV:277-282, and in Ruddy, *Apostolic Constitution*, 20-31, Latin-English facing pages.

24 Pope Pius XII, *Motu Proprio Sacram communionem* (19 March 1957), AAS 49 (1957) 177-78, trans. CLD IV:286-288, and in Ruddy, *Apostolic Constitution*, 116-19, Latin-English facing pages.

25 *Christus Dominus* in particular engendered extensive commentary. See Ruddy, *Apostolic Constitution*, *passim*, and the bibliography summarized in CLD IV:282.

26 On 21 November 1964, at the close of the third session of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI declared: "In view of the difficulties felt in many countries concerning the Eucharistic fast, the Supreme Pontiff, graciously acceding to the petitions of the Bishops, grants that the fast from solid foods be reduced to one hour before Communion, for both priests

distinctions between solid food and liquids, so that both fell under the one-hour rubric, and those lately introduced between celebrants and people, fixing the same fast for both. The Johanno-Pauline Code adopted Paul VI's discipline without demur.²⁷

TOWARD REFORMING THE EUCHARISTIC FAST

Conceding that the present fasting discipline must greatly facilitate an increase in the raw number of receptions of the Eucharist, we may nevertheless ask whether some pastoral problems are associated with the current discipline. It seems that there may be several.

First, regardless of how a one-hour "fast" is calculated, such a brief period is *physically* insufficient to place a normal person into anything like a "fasting" state. If, as a millennium and a half suggest, some significant level of *corporal* fasting is conducive to the worthy reception of the Eucharist, it must be frankly admitted that such a state cannot be accomplished in one hour's time.²⁸

Second, in the most common setting for reception of the Eucharist, namely, Mass, making the actual reception of the Eucharist decisive as the *terminus ad quem* of the fast inevitably leads to distracting speculation about, for example, how long the homily was (shorter

and the faithful. In this grant is included also the use of alcoholic drinks, observing, however, due moderation." See [P. Felici], "Tempus Eucharistici ieiunii servandi reducitur," AAS 57 (1965) 186, trans. CLD VI:566. The text of this announcement appeared in *L'Osservatore Romano* (4 December 1964) 2, and stated that the provision was effective immediately, that is, without observance of a *vacatio legis*.

27 One commentator finds the phrase "at least one hour" currently used in delineating the eucharistic fast (but not found in Paul VI's norm) to be encouraging perhaps of a longer voluntary fast. See Huels, *New Commentary on the Code*, 1114. There is some support for this suggestion in the legislative history of 1983 CIC 919 § 1, in that the word *saltem* was added to 1980 Schema 871 § 1 "ut clarius appareat agi de minimo quaesito." See Edward Peters, *Incrementa in progressu 1983 Codicis iuris canonici: A Legislative History of the 1983 Code of Canon Law* (Montreal: Wilson & Lafleur, 2005) 839, referencing in turn *Communicationes* 15: 195. I see, however, no evidence that such voluntary additional efforts to extend their eucharistic fasts have been undertaken by the faithful.

28 In this regard, see David Torevell, *Losing the Sacred: Ritual, Modernity, and Liturgical Reform* (Edinburgh: Clark, 2000), *passim*, on the danger of over-cerebralization in the post-conciliar liturgy. The present "fast" for the eucharistic reception is so insignificant that the body need undergo no especial preparation for its role in worship. I think this contributes to the down-grading of the importance of the body in liturgical prayer. Indeed, some might well wonder how important the Eucharist can really be if one may prepare for its reception so casually.

homilies make the “fast” more difficult to complete), or whether there will be singing at Mass (extra verses in hymns delay the start of the communion rite), or whether one has a better chance of “finishing the fast” by waiting until the end of communion time, and so on. None of these cogitations helps to dispose the faithful toward fruitful participation in the liturgy or worthy reception of the Eucharist.

Third, focusing the eucharistic fast on the reception of communion, rather than on the start of Mass wherein the real and substantial presence of the Lord will be confected, diminishes appreciation of the liturgy of the Word as a real encounter with Christ important in its own right. The faithful are led to overlook the proclamation of the Word as being something worthy of preparation, too, and focuses them only on communion. The example of Christ *teaching* hungry people before feeding them is lost (Mk 6:34-42).

Fourth – and I think this point is under-appreciated – because everyone knows that a one-hour “fast” period is almost impossible *not* to satisfy, the only reason a Catholic could have for *not* receiving the Eucharist at Mass would be his or her awareness of being in the state of grave sin. To sit in the pew while everyone else goes to communion, then, is tantamount to saying “I think I have sinned gravely, and I have not been to confession yet.” This fact places great pressure on people with guilty or doubtful consciences to go to communion rather than risk speculation by others about why they are not going. With no significant fasting requirement to “hide behind,” the risk of sacrilegious communions cannot but increase.

To the degree that any, let alone most or even all, of these concerns can be verified, there seems reason to reconsider the current discipline of the eucharistic fast. Let us ask first, what seems good about it?

First, I think it is good that the fast is observed in light of a fixed *terminus ad quem*. Requiring the fast to be observed from midnight unduly disadvantages those whose schedules make late morning, afternoon, or evening Masses most convenient. Second, I think it good that celebrants and people observe the same eucharistic fast, since both are called to participate worthily in the divine banquet albeit by different titles.²⁹ Third, the exceptions for the infirm are correctly and broadly applied; the sick and weak should be encouraged to receive the Eucharist without scruple over a disciplinary norm.³⁰ Fourth,

29 Priests who, out of pastoral necessity, are called upon to celebrate Mass more than once a day should not feel obliged to fast before those subsequent celebrations. This contingency is already anticipated in the law: see 1983 CIC 919 § 2.

30 Where food is prescribed to be taken along with medications, say, to prevent upset of the stomach, such should certainly be allowed. Common

the eucharistic fast is happily *not* enforced by a penal norm; while it certainly binds in conscience, it should be explained to the people, and then left to the internal forum for adjudication.³¹

What seems wrong about the current discipline of the eucharistic fast is this: it is much too short to serve as a “fast” by any sensible definition. This in turn provokes a number of pastoral disadvantages. The brevity of the fast to the point of being negligible does not help the faithful call to mind the approaching mysteries before actually departing for Mass; it makes the conduct of the liturgy itself a distracting factor in completing the fast; and it deprives those with troubled consciences of an unobtrusive way to avoid approaching the Body and Blood of the Lord in a state that risks profanation (1 Cor 11:27).

I propose the following reform: simply restate the eucharistic fast so that all food and drink should be avoided for the three hours prior to the beginning of Mass.³² This longer period of fast protects

sense indicates that diabetics, expectant women, and so on, should be allowed to eat or drink when they feel it necessary. This is already anticipated in the law. See 1983 CIC 919 § 3. Personally, I see little reason to allow care-givers the same privilege here, but the matter is *de minimis*.

31 “En esta norma se trata de un precepto moral que debe despertar en el fiel una postura respetuosa ante la Eucaristía.” Reinhild Ahlers, commentary on 1983 CIC 919, in *Código de Derecho Canónico Edición bilingüe, fuentes y comentarios de todos los cánones*, ed. Antonio Benlloch Poveda, 8th ed. (Valencia: EDICEP, 1994) 422. Gramunt advises that pastors of souls form their people in a spirit of reverent reception even if they are not otherwise obligated, for one reason or another, to observe the eucharistic fast. See Ignatius Gramunt, commentary on 1983 CIC 919, in A. Marzo, et al., eds, *Exegetical Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*, vol. 3.1, ed. Angel Marzoa et al. (Montreal: Wilson & Lafleur, Chicago: Midwest Theological Forum, 2004) 627-29, at 629.

32 Reformulated, 1983 CIC 919 § 1 would read: “Sanctissimam Eucharistiam recepturus per spatium saltem trium horarum ante initium Missae abstineat a quocumque cibo et potu, excepta tantummodo aqua atque medicina.” If the legislator deemed that some express provision should be made regarding the reception of communion outside of Mass, he could either include that in the above draft or, I suggest, allow the three-hour fast to end at the projected time of communion. The time difference between the two options is slight in these shorter rites, and the exigencies indicating the appropriateness of reception of communion outside of Mass in the first place merit accommodation. Moreover, I think that attempts to distinguish between solid and liquid foods—great fodder for canonical quibbles about caramels and milkshakes and soups and tea and so on—should simply be dropped. There is no *essential* difference between solid or liquid nourishment, and canon law should not try to erect one. Finally, by permitting the healthy to take only water during the eucharistic fast, earlier debates about what constituted “nutritional” substances are also obviated.

all of the undoubted advantages of the current discipline, it resolves *all* of the disadvantages outlined above, and it provides, in the more common setting of Mass, the additional advantage of helping the faithful to appreciate better the importance of the liturgy of the Word as something intimately connected to the eucharistic liturgy.

A three-hour fast is not burdensome for healthy people. Refraining from food and drink for a notable period of time before Mass reminds one that a privileged encounter with Christ, in both Word and Sacrament, is soon approaching and that it deserves one's conscious attention.

*Edward N. Peters, J.C.D., J.D., is Edmund Cardinal Szoka Chair, Sacred Heart Major Seminary, Detroit, Michigan, and author of numerous articles and books, including *Incrementa in progressu 1983 Codicis iuris canonici: A Legislative History of the 1983 Code of Canon Law (2005)* and *Excommunication and the Catholic Church: Straight Answers to Tough Questions (2006)*.*