

# Resources for Orthodox (and other) Christians to understand Holy Tradition in relation to the Coronavirus Pandemic

## The Administration of Holy Communion in the Orthodox Church

At the link below you will find historical information on how Holy Communion has been distributed to the faithful in the Orthodox Church over the centuries. The Communion spoon has not been the only accepted method of distribution by any means. St Basil in the 4<sup>th</sup> century referred to the Holy Gifts of the Eucharist as being received in the hand.<sup>1</sup> This prevailed until the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> century. St Nikodemos the Hagiorite in the 18<sup>th</sup> century had his own plague infection protection instructions for the chalice, and nobody thought this either strange or unacceptable. Sadly, many Orthodox today are ignorant of Church history.

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<https://orthodoxtimes.com/a-note-on-the-common-communion-spoon/>

## How epidemics began to be controlled in Europe from the 16<sup>th</sup> Century

This article explains how churches in Italy responded to the challenges of plague infection in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Practical measures were instructed by the clergy to control infections. Quarantine and sanitisation measures were already being practised, including the closure of churches where and when necessary. Note: no State persecution paranoia is in evidence at this time! The Church considered it necessary in its pastoral work to protect and care for her people. This was never questioned.

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2020-04/epidemics-quarantines-empty-churches-history-tornielli.html>

Quarantine to limit infection transmission and to protect individuals and communities has always involved locking down, either to stop disease entering or moving on to infect others. Modern infection control measures were already being used effectively in Ferrara in 1576 which meant that not a single person died of plague notwithstanding the devastation of neighbouring towns and cities. Read the remarkable story here. You don't have to "live with a virus."

<https://www.history.com/news/plague-italy-public-health-ferrara>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3202093.htm>

In England, the Derbyshire village of Eyam decided when plague struck not to allow anyone to leave or visit so that the disease would not spread to other neighbouring villages. Villagers voluntarily sacrificed themselves to save others. Nobody complained about their human rights or demonstrated against practical measures to save lives. Here is the village's story ....

[https://wellcomecollection.org/articles/XO0I9RAAGo8a2St?utm\\_source=google&utm\\_medium=adgrant&utm\\_campaign=plague\\_village&gclid=CjwKCAjw9aiBhA1EiwAJ\\_GTSpYpNGsNoL5EuEEsncTKtUW5PKJTiLq1iVHUkSMXMWuFleeyCPA\\_xoC-ZYQAvD\\_BwE](https://wellcomecollection.org/articles/XO0I9RAAGo8a2St?utm_source=google&utm_medium=adgrant&utm_campaign=plague_village&gclid=CjwKCAjw9aiBhA1EiwAJ_GTSpYpNGsNoL5EuEEsncTKtUW5PKJTiLq1iVHUkSMXMWuFleeyCPA_xoC-ZYQAvD_BwE)

## **Vaccination – the Game Changer**

The success of the modern fight against epidemics and pandemics started with one remarkable man, Edward Jenner, and his discovery of the protective value of vaccination. His amazing story can be found here. We should be truly grateful for the countless lives he saved down the decades.

[https://wellcomecollection.org/articles/X1d2gREAAB8A3eun?utm\\_source=Google&utm\\_medium=adgrant&utm\\_campaign=stories\\_cowpoxandjenner&gclid=CjwKCAjw9aiBhA1EiwAJ\\_GTSpUtJ9q9FVTY3xFzrO8DxeRCBgLQFu8x\\_t08PE35tJsEeEPAh9wUhoCjOEQAvD\\_BwE](https://wellcomecollection.org/articles/X1d2gREAAB8A3eun?utm_source=Google&utm_medium=adgrant&utm_campaign=stories_cowpoxandjenner&gclid=CjwKCAjw9aiBhA1EiwAJ_GTSpUtJ9q9FVTY3xFzrO8DxeRCBgLQFu8x_t08PE35tJsEeEPAh9wUhoCjOEQAvD_BwE)

This excellent article tells the story of the eradication of smallpox using Jenner's research. For a time in Britain vaccination became mandatory, such were the challenges presented by the disease. Predictably, ignorance and superstition gave birth to the first anti-vaccination movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This, however, did not halt the effectiveness of global vaccination in ridding the world of this horrible, dangerous and disfiguring disease.

<https://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/objects-and-stories/medicine/smallpox-and-story-vaccination>

In 1864, the Church of Greece led the way in strongly urging believers to get vaccinated against smallpox, even to the point of incurring the wrath of God if they didn't. The contrast with today could not be more stark! Here is the encyclical ...

[http://www.bio-orthodoxy.com/2021/07/encyclical-from-1864-shows-orthodox.html?m=1&fbclid=IwAR2qlu9lv\\_uflWKhRz-pi8MhX8YX8Wjz7JSEIIN4DPOtAR4\\_9-Ra5bY2WQk](http://www.bio-orthodoxy.com/2021/07/encyclical-from-1864-shows-orthodox.html?m=1&fbclid=IwAR2qlu9lv_uflWKhRz-pi8MhX8YX8Wjz7JSEIIN4DPOtAR4_9-Ra5bY2WQk)

Smallpox was only just the beginning. Here is an account of all those diseases, many fatal and afflicting childhood, that we DON'T have to worry about now ... provided that we continue to get our children vaccinated.

<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents/diseases/forgot-14-diseases.html>

## **What about abortion?**

It is a concern for some Christians that SOME vaccines may involve the use of foetal cell lines from abortions. Firstly, this concerns SOME vaccines, but not all. However, this is not as simple as it may seem. We are talking here about stored tissue samples that are DECADES old. Of course, abortion is wrong but when tissue that could have been discarded is used many years later to save lives there is no INSTRUMENTAL LINK between the first act and the second act. That is where the moral or spiritual fault might lie ... but this does not apply here because there is neither a link nor an intention between the two acts, so separated in time.

Even the Vatican, together with the papacy itself, clearly having a superior track record in opposing abortion, have declared that there is no troubling moral or spiritual issue here. Read Rome's analysis of the question on the following link. This statement is entirely consistent with Orthodox theology.

[https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20201221\\_nota-vaccini-anticovid\\_en.html?fbclid=IwAR2YtesSUd6V7xQG7aT9M4nV11H8lQordz\\_nbxV2k4KT2rm4eTZarh8e3ms](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20201221_nota-vaccini-anticovid_en.html?fbclid=IwAR2YtesSUd6V7xQG7aT9M4nV11H8lQordz_nbxV2k4KT2rm4eTZarh8e3ms)

## **Are the Orthodox falling for a modern heresy under the guise of piety? The Heresy of Mary Baker Eddy <sup>2</sup>**

Mary Baker Eddy founded the Protestant sect known as “The Church of Christ, Scientist”. She believed that all sickness was a lack of faith, affecting the mind first and then the body from a diseased mind.

Here are some quotes from Eddy which explains her position on divine healing:

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[https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary\\_Baker\\_Eddy?fbclid=IwAR3Yn\\_U580BPsOKNLGoQamyRE0yDB6Qcsjx4Pw0TRPSP0p0055gTyqYH4tQ](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Baker_Eddy?fbclid=IwAR3Yn_U580BPsOKNLGoQamyRE0yDB6Qcsjx4Pw0TRPSP0p0055gTyqYH4tQ)

*"Disease is an experience of a so-called mortal mind. It is fear made manifest on the body."*

*"Spirit is the real and eternal; matter is the unreal and temporal."*

*"Health is not a condition of matter, but of Mind."*

*(Mary Baker Eddy)*

Although Eddy's teaching opposed medical intervention she was not consistent in observing that herself. This is comparable to some Orthodox today who resist medical treatment, but on a highly selective basis. She also taught that faith alone could offer a believer complete healing, deprecating physicians.

Some Orthodox who believe that God throws a wall of protection around believers (especially in church) and that those who do not accept this are lacking in faith come perilously close to Eddy's heresy.

However, Eddy's mentalism in which she emphasised the purity of the mind freed from matter, is not generally shared by those Orthodox who are suspicious of modern medicine. Their error is somewhat different and proposes a sharp division between the Church as a haven of miracles and the world as a desert of faithlessness and error. This stance is more characteristic of Pentecostalism. These heresies always arise in times of social stress.

Sadly, many Orthodox today have succumbed to these heresies and their hubris often causes them to stand in judgement over their fellow Orthodox who are supposed to have surrendered in fear as slaves to the world. The tragic result of these attitudes is division in the Church. This has happened many times before and, frankly, Orthodox Christians ought to know better!

### **In case this needs to be restated (and it does)!**

Orthodox Christianity honours medical science in its healing and protective mission. It is the very gift of God Himself. Those who resist physicians and then in their behaviours endanger others are not commended. This is the consistent witness of Scripture and Tradition. Hear Sirach for example: -

<sup>1</sup> Honour physicians for their services,  
for the Lord created them;

<sup>2</sup> for their gift of healing comes from the Most High,  
and they are rewarded by the king.

<sup>3</sup> The skill of physicians makes them distinguished,  
and in the presence of the great they are admired.

<sup>4</sup>The Lord created medicines out of the earth,  
and the sensible will not despise them.  
<sup>5</sup>Was not water made sweet with a tree  
in order that its power might be known?  
<sup>6</sup>And he gave skill to human beings  
that he<sup>l</sup> might be glorified in his marvellous works.  
<sup>7</sup>By them the physician heals and takes away pain;  
<sup>8</sup> the pharmacist makes a mixture from them.  
God's works will never be finished;  
and from him health spreads over all the earth.  
(*Wisdom of Sirach 38:1-8*)

... and now St Basil ...

**St Basil the Great of Caesarea (Letter 189) To Eustathius the physician:**

Humanity is the regular business of all you who practise as physicians. And, in my opinion, to put your science at the head and front of life's pursuits is to decide reasonably and rightly. This at all events seems to be the case if man's most precious possession, life, is painful and not worth living, unless it be lived in health, and if for health we are dependent on your skill.

## **Orthodox Christianity and Science**

If you would like to explore more concerning the positive relationship between Orthodox Christianity and Science, take a look at this web site which has an open and comprehensive link index of resources and articles on this topic.

<http://www.bio-orthodoxy.com/>

## **Finally!**

Finally, the last word must lie with St Augustine and his commentary on Genesis. He had to do battle with anti-science (or natural philosophy) Christians in his own time. This is the classic patristic statement about the mutual respect that should exist between science and faith.

Saint Augustine (A.D. 354-430) in his work *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* (*De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim*) provided excellent advice for all Christians who are faced with the task of interpreting Scripture in the light of scientific knowledge. This translation is by J. H. Taylor in *Ancient Christian Writers*, Newman Press, 1982, volume 41.

Usually, even a non-Christian knows something about the earth, the heavens, and the other elements of this world, about the motion and orbit of the stars and even their size and relative positions, about the predictable eclipses of the sun and moon, the cycles of the years and the seasons, about the kinds of animals, shrubs, stones, and so forth, and this knowledge he holds to as being certain from reason and experience. Now, it is a disgraceful and dangerous thing for an infidel to hear a Christian, presumably giving the meaning of Holy Scripture, talking nonsense on these topics; and we should take all means to prevent such an embarrassing situation, in which people show up vast ignorance in a Christian and laugh it to scorn.

The shame is not so much that an ignorant individual is derided, but that people outside the household of faith think our sacred writers held such opinions, and, to the great loss of those for whose salvation we toil, the writers of our Scripture are criticized and rejected as unlearned men. If they find a Christian mistaken in a field which they themselves know well and hear him maintaining his foolish opinions about our books, how are they going to believe those books in matters concerning the resurrection of the dead, the hope of eternal life, and the kingdom of heaven, when they think their pages are full of falsehoods and on facts which they themselves have learnt from experience and the light of reason?

Reckless and incompetent expounders of Holy Scripture bring untold trouble and sorrow on their wiser brethren when they are caught in one of their mischievous false opinions and are taken to task by those who are not bound by the authority of our sacred books. For then, to defend their utterly foolish and obviously untrue statements, they will try to call upon Holy Scripture for proof and even recite from memory many passages which they think support their position, although they understand neither what they say nor the things about which they make assertion. [1 Timothy 1.7]

*[Saint Augustine, On the Literal Meaning of Genesis, Book 1, Chapter 19]*

Archpriest Gregory Hallam      6<sup>th</sup> August 2021

*The Transfiguration of our Lord and God and Saviour, Jesus Christ*