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INTERCOMMUNION.

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THE implications of this polysyllable, at the present moment, involve not only problems of Christian polity in the mission field and their reactions upon Anglican mentality at home, but the personal attitude of Evangelical Churchmen to their nonconformist neighbours in the faith. To most this is a practical question affecting conduct as well as opinion. Intercommunion may be illustrated as presenting problems, if we think on the one hand of the more or less technical difficulties of the Anglican mind, and on the other of the spiritual scrupulosity that has crystallized communion into exclusiveness among the "brethren."

Sympathy must be requested for some impatience with the "beggarly elements," so important to the Anglican, and with the seeming unbrotherliness of the "brethren"; it will be more helpful to attempt a consideration of the spiritual conditions underlying intercommunion as an experience than the technicalities of either controversy. The feeling must be confessed that, however interesting to the liturgiologist are the details of practice and form, and however difficult to the historian the nature of episcopacy or the development and status of nonconformity, their discussion proves ultimately arid of spiritual stimulus. Unless our consideration of this subject of intercommunion can be transferred to its spiritual aspect it will be unpractical and barren. We desire to derive that result, which we call blessing, from this subject, and are therefore compelled, in looking upward to the source of all spiritual insight, to overlook the inferior details with which it is so apt to be entangled.

Intercommunion is necessary in the development of a society designed for the propagation of the Gospel in foreign parts—the delightful title of a venerable institution which crystallizes the marching orders of the Church and to whom we may commend this suggestion—and necessary if a universal fellowship of the Spirit is to be attained in the Church militant here on earth. The capital of this trading society is to be intercommunicated and multiplied in fellowship, not laid up in the napkin of self-preservation. It will be evident that no problem of intercommunion will remain for discussion if we hesitate, as to this initial premiss, that it is the purpose of the Great Shepherd to collect into one flock His sheep of different folds.

The prerequisite to intercommunion is Union with Christ. This, being a truth of Divine revelation, passes human understanding in its definition, but the reality is experimentally experienced; the heart is enlightened to know that it is the object of the eternal purpose of redemption; that the Head at Calvary experienced a mystical union with His members which the Spirit of Life, by whom He rose from the dead, demonstrates in them. This demonstration

of union here is, though partial, typical ; it is an earnest of the manifestation to the worlds of the culminating glory of God in Christ, and its expression is involved in, and implied by, the intercommunion of His people.

Is not the whole of this Divine purpose and operation enclosed in these pregnant sentences ? “ I believe in the Holy Ghost ; the Holy Catholic Church ; the Communion of Saints.”

The first prayer book of Edward VI published the alternative thanksgiving in the Holy Communion Office and also the Collect for All Saints. Bishop Dowden traces in these the influence of Hermann von Wied, Archbishop of Cologne, who, like Cranmer, was afterwards excommunicated for heresy. The Collect describes the “ Elect ” as “ knit together in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body ” of Christ ; the Communion thanksgiving adds the definition “ which is the blessed company of all faithful people,” and prays that we may continue in that holy fellowship. The connection of this definition with the Lord’s Supper, or Communion, in St. Paul’s words is that “ We being many are one bread and one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread.”

Fellow-members of the body discern their interrelationship ; this, a fruit of the Spirit, is a token of participation in Eternal life. The one loaf of the Lord’s Supper (which the use of wafers obscures) is an embodiment of fellowship with Him and with one another. The liberty of the Spirit characterizes the family life in God, spiritual friendships ensue in prayer and praise, in the Scriptures, in the experiences of the pilgrimage and in Gospel labours.

The proclamation and exposition of the truth of the mystical union of Christ’s body creates a spiritual emotion which draws men out of the shallows into the deep and calls urgently for the fellowship sacrament. This has been illustrated at Keswick, at Jerusalem, and in the mission field. The ideal becomes in a measure actual ; prayer for unity has been answered ; and the Communion of Saints has become not only a creed, but an experience.

Under such circumstances and influence it is anomalous to refrain from the sacrament of fellowship, it restrains both charity and faith. Intercommunion of spirit cannot stop short of sacramental fellowship without denying the nature of a sacrament.

Descending into a consideration of denominational problems—the term seems antithetical—an endeavour must be made to appreciate the hesitation of a school of Anglican churchmen to such intercommunion as we have indicated. It is difficult to apprehend how this can be based upon any fundamental difference of spiritual values, as union with Christ and the evidences of His Spirit’s presence will not be questioned by the most hesitant. The objection seems to arise from that root of division, the attempt to identify a visible entity with a spiritual reality. To the Evangelical—are we mistaken in so using the term ?—the Church of the living God on earth is a spiritual fellowship, and not the resultant of a combination of spiritual and sacerdotal qualifications, in which the

latter may compromise the former, limiting or preventing the wider fellowship of faith.

The hesitation is, unquestionably, conscientious; conscience adheres naturally, and often indiscriminately, to authority; but while respecting the element of obedience to truth we may ask, is not any doctrine of the nature of the Church of Christ brought to the test by the emotion of fellowship in the possession of the heavenly treasure of union with the Lord and His members? Is a bondage which hinders the privilege of intercommunion a fruit of the Spirit?

The challenge to the conscience is not really to the greater and essential principles of the Presence of the Master in the hearts comprehended in fellowship, or to the work of the unifying Spirit, but to the detail of the authority of the ministrant of the sacrament which expresses the recognized fellowship.

Is this a sufficient ground upon which intercommunion should be declined? Does the person of the minister invalidate or pre-empt the Spirit? Authority has now raised its ominous hand; it questions validity, and, in losing sight of the substance, the investigation of this shadow may shift us back from the deep into the shallows, where the roots of division germinate; and like the Nile *sudd* develop until they obstruct the stream of intercommunion.

At this point Evangelicals shiver; not that their individual peace is threatened, but the quickened hope of intercommunion is endangered. A strange wind is blighting the garden, hindering the flowing out of its spices, those happy contacts of heart which witness the unifying companionship of the Master, tokens of everlasting pleasure.

S. Paul's nervousness, like other apostolic experiences, reappears; fearful of offending the scrupulous but unyielding in its grasp of liberty. "I am afraid of you": lest any deprive you of your fellowship, "after the tradition of men and not after Christ"; "let no man therefore judge you in meat or in drink"; things that are shadows, "for the body is of Christ."

What is this authority and what is the validity contingent upon its imprimatur? The Evangelical shortly refers all authority in the Church of Christ and all effectual operation to the Holy Spirit; undelegated and unintercepted; recognized by, and mutual to, His subjects by faith.

The ground of fellowship is our direct access by one Spirit, without the interposition of authorized or unauthorized priests. Are the experienced gifts of the Spirit of Grace to be retrieved from us for lack of traditional authorization? Our Lord answered the ecclesiastical challenge to His authority by reference to the admitted validity of the Baptist's extraneous Ministry; and we may also resort, in this irrelevant questioning, to the evidences of the Holy Spirit's fruitfulness in divers ministries.

Evangelicals must shake themselves into freedom from the web of tradition, with which authority and validity entangle inter-

communion. We must maintain freedom of heart and conscience for fellowship in Holy Communion with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in incorruptness ; and reflect that the infallibility, which is a logical necessity for the solution of the dilemma of the visible Church, does not belong to any one branch of the fellowship of Christ.

Fellowship by intercommunion, however, must imply organization. The order involved in doing "decently" connotes an ordained ministry of the word and sacraments. We remind ourselves that what becomes necessary does not become unscriptural. The promise of the Presence, where two or three are gathered in His name, is as effectual if the number enlarges, ten or a hundredfold on earth, or to millions in heaven. Earthly conditions demanding organization, the problem of intercommunion becomes that of the administration of the sacrament of fellowship—that is, of the office of minister among the brethren as "he that serveth." Does the promised blessing fail, and does spiritual fellowship cease, if the ministrant lacks aught but the Divine Call? It is a proper deduction from Article XXVI that the minister is not the agent of the effect of the Sacrament ; the spiritual reality lies outside his hands. That movement of the Spirit which creates the desire for intercommunion is deflected by discussion of the status of the minister. Is not this after all one of the "weak and beggarly elements"? If His Divine Presence is the valid power in the Sacrament of fellowship, this interposition of human conditions jeopardizes rather than ensures that blessing.

It is necessary to recall that the scriptural qualifications for communion, in the members of the fellowship are true repentance and lively faith.

The rubric, exhortation and invitation of our Service are simple and explicit as to the discipline of conscience and the necessity of faith. Slackness and formality are negated and the ultimate necessity of excommunicating evil-livers and heretics is stated.

In spite of the apparent difficulty, at home, of exercising primitive discipline and discrimination among communicants, difficulties which can be dealt with in the more primitive conditions of infant Churches, it must be urged that heart-searching leads to holiness, and that it would be well for the Church of England if the modern tendency to multiply services of Holy Communion indicated that the exhortations of that service were solemnly impressed upon communicants. There is nothing in the Prayer Book to authorize their omission ; even where daily administration is practised.

The Sacrament has happily ceased to be employed as a political test, through the failure of the ideal that occasioned it, but we cannot regard its use as a test of Churchmanship as otherwise than dangerous, in the absence of a fencing of the table, once a searching ordinance in Scotland.

It would be a symptom of spiritual vitality if the problems of intercommunion were practical instead of theoretical ; related to

self-examination, the lively character of faith and mutual charity ; subjects on which there is no divergence between the Churches. Intercommunion would thus be related to revival and progress to spiritual reunion could be more easily envisaged.

Unity of doctrine also has a fundamental relation to fellowship. The most characteristic physical quality of a building is adherence to its foundation. A principle most simply expressed in the passive injunction " Abide in me." The simple doctrine of the Gospel, which in effecting conversion insists upon child-likeness of mind, needs not to be complicated with doctrinal controversy and definitions. Unity of heart with Christ is wrought by the Holy Spirit often through a single shaft of truth, with infinite results.

The Church, throughout its branches, continuously responds and vibrates to the Spirit of life Who testifies of Jesus. There may be as little agreement as to sacramental definitions as to sacramental rites, but there is harmony in the notes that glorify Him.

It must be obvious that the simplest forms and rites will be the most unifying, and that intercommunion demands this simplicity. Emphasis upon the method may weaken the sense of fellowship, but concentration upon the doctrine that is according to Godliness cannot tend to mere sacramentalism.

Neither does the Gospel of fellowship with a living Head lead to private interpretations that produce exclusiveness, the antithesis of intercommunion. Have we not, each for himself, discovered that the magnetic potency of Divine love, with its positive as well as negative forces, is a unifying force, despite our peculiarities and inherited divisions ?

The psalmody of the universal Church is already preparing the way ; it is already an intercommunion of praise and prayer ; striking the collective harmonies, to which the individual heart responds, without questioning the human instrument. " The truth, as it is in Jesus," is unifying ; He is the focus of intercommunion, subduing imaginations and hearts to Himself.

It will follow that the vindication of the power of the doctrine of His name over the bonds of sectarianism becomes a manifestation of His glory, for which the Church should pray and to the attaining of which it should make an energetic advance.

It may be asked if by freedom in communicating the integrity of the Church of England as an organism held together by its historic orders would be lost ?

The bold answer may be attempted that the effort should be made to render the Church of England, in fact, what it assumes to be in name, the fellowship of Christ in this nation. This may, indeed, be stark Protestantism, but we need not be any more nervous of the term than of Catholicism. We protest that all who are Christ's are of His Church and we claim their fellowship. The battle of the Reformers was fought for the liberation of the truth of the Gospel, and their vision of a national Church was created by their perception of its simplicity and liberty.

The recovery within a reunited national Church of the consciousness of unity in Christ, expressed by intercommunion but admitting existing diversities of administrations and gifts, may be an ideal ; it may be charged with overlooking history and forgetting the disparate tendencies that have followed upon freedom from papal rule ; but history may yet be made, as it was at the Reformation. The Spirit of God works His own "revivals," and we cannot limit His operations by historical or ecclesiastical precedents.

The missionary propaganda of the last century, out of Europe into Africa and the East, emanating from the Protestant Churches, is now reacting upon the Church at home and compelling the consideration of this relatively local matter of intercommunion. It is small as compared with its issues and strangely local when we reflect upon the anomaly of expanding the Church of our island into a community more extensive than the British Empire.

The opportunity of revising the Prayer Book in conference with the Protestant Churches, most of whom regard it with affectionate sympathy, has been lost ; skilful piloting has deflected the purpose of the revision into a reversion. It may be that the opportunity will recur, as the Bishops' book satisfies neither the extremes nor the centre of the line. The hindrance to intercommunion with Protestant Churches by the alterations of the Communion Service should be rectified. The purpose of achieving a liturgy to illustrate, maybe, a *via media* for Roman, Greek and Anglican has never been more than a dream.

It should be the Evangelical policy to promote a new demand for a revision that would assist home reunion by recognizing intercommunion, and for this a few rubrics would probably suffice.

As we consider the strength of the bonds of Christian love and truth and remember how they strengthen themselves in exercise against our common enemy ; how such comradeship unites ; how the great work of Moody and Sankey a generation ago drew earnest helpers from all the Churches without a sign of difference ; how the great Conferences at Keswick evoke in scriptural exposition the practical fruits of the ministries of teaching ; and how missionary policy when brought under review compels unity of heart and worship, we may well take courage and offer thanksgiving and praise to the Father of Spirits for these manifestations of the unifying power of the prayer of the Lord Jesus.

The plaintive beauty of our petition for unity cannot remain in the Prayer Book without anticipation of an answer. What answer ? Intercommunion would be one patent cause for thanksgiving that "as there is but one Body, and one Spirit, and one Hope of our Calling, one God and father of us all, so we may henceforth be all of one heart, and of one soul united in one holy bond of Truth and Peace, of Faith and Charity, and may with one mind and one mouth glorify God."