

INTERCOMMUNION.

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"INTERCOMMUNION" in this article means the readiness, as occasions arise, to give communion to members of other Churches and to receive it from them. This would appear to be so normal and natural to the Christian spirit of fellowship, so Christlike in its insistence on heart rather than head, that it must be the usual practice of all who call themselves the followers of Christ. What, however, are the facts with regard to the sacrament of Holy Communion? This sacrament is observed by practically all Christians in the world, and they all observe it to the best of their power as they feel that Christ meant it to be observed. In this they are one; but because their interpretations differ there arise divisions, and this act of fellowship becomes the great moment for separation.

How has this state of things arisen? Various causes have been at work. The very sacredness of the ceremony has led to a desire to preserve it by hedging it around with restrictions, and those restrictions, proving useful, have gradually come to be regarded as part of their essence, so also the *will* to believe that which it *does* believe, has made the mind read back into the past, and even into the mind of the Founder, things which have normally and naturally developed by the agency of man. As we read the records of the institution of the sacrament, we find that they centre wholly upon the memorial of Christ's death and its meaning for mankind. This is the new and unique contribution of the sacrament to the religious life of the world. Pagan religions already knew much about sharing the life of the god by partaking of his sacrificial meal or of his flesh. This conception is almost universal, for it is the expression of the generally accepted truth of God dwelling in man and man in God; and the knowledge of the risen Christ and of His victorious life to be shared by men, naturally made the early Christians associate this thought with the sacrament. But it is not its central gift, and the Church, in making the *reception of grace*, through the participation in the body and blood symbolized in the sacrament, as the very centre of the service, was introducing ethnic thought and replacing the primary by the secondary; and with ethnic thought came the ethnic priesthood necessary for the right performance of the magic act. Priestcraft has always led to exclusiveness, for it lives on the assumption that certain gifts lie with certain men or offices, and these are carefully safeguarded. This attitude leads to an emphasis not only on the fact that we are right, which is necessary for any strong conviction, but also to the belief that you are wrong, which is by no means a necessary corollary. Our Lord made the contrast between His absolute knowledge and man's limited grasp of truth quite clear, for on one

occasion He said, "He that is not with Me is against Me" (Matt. xii. 30), and on another, "He that is not against you is for you" (Luke ix. 50, R.V.). Once the exclusive conception arose, it is easy to see how it was maintained. We are men of custom and very readily run in a groove. We are all born conservative. We fear that which is different from that to which we are used. We easily think that the one method which has proved beneficial must be the only method. Then, secondly, we are influenced by æsthetic considerations. Not only have we become used to, but we have grown to love the order and the beauty of our own particular worship, the form of our Church and the ritual of our service; the atmosphere and the ritual make their peculiar appeal to us and we begin to associate the blessing as much with the form as with the fact. Then again, we have been given definite teaching in the matter by men convinced of what they teach, and the very certainty of their own experiences has blinded them to the certainty of other experiences of other men. This has led to exclusive dogma about the necessity of the priest, the effect of the words of administration, and regarding Holy Communion as the final pledge of unity amongst those who have reached the same conclusion. We thus see that our mind starts full of prejudices and preconceptions. There is no subject in which this is not so, but perhaps nowhere more than in religion are we liable to be influenced by things which will not stand the full light of enquiry. Shall we try and clear our mind of all the things that would prejudice a clear-sighted and true conclusion?

First, then, let us examine whether this doctrinaire and exclusive attitude is according to the mind of Christ. As we read the Gospels and discover the spirit of our Lord, we find Him the friend of harlot and publican, of rich and poor, of wise and ignorant. He includes all in the extensive circle of His universal love. On the other hand, we find the whole force of His invective hurled against the narrow, exclusive spirit of the Pharisee and the priest. Those who read the facts and do not read their own view back into the facts cannot but be convinced that exclusiveness was the one vice which our Lord would not tolerate. He demanded loyalty to His person, He refused that the disciples should demand loyalty to theirs: he that is not against you is for you.

Secondly, let us examine the spirit of the ceremony of institution at the Last Supper. What do we find there? We find a body of disciples tense with excitement, expecting the revelation of the Messiah, feeling that at any moment now they might enter into the worldly glory of their Lord and be the princes of His earthly kingdom. We see men who on various occasions had been reproved for seeking places of authority amongst themselves, and who are now filled with a bitter sense of jealousy for those two sons of Zebedee for whom special honours had been recently demanded. In this spirit they approached the upper chamber on that last night and, filled with the thoughts of human dignity, not one of them had been ready to demean himself to fetch the basin of water to be placed

at the door that they might in eastern wise wash their feet and enter the room clean. Our Lord never did things for show, and if during supper He rose and took a basin and water and a towel, it was because the feet of the disciples were not clean. He did this act not only to show them what they should do for one another but to remind them of what they *should have done* for one another. This more than anything will explain the attitude of Peter. Later, bread and wine were distributed among them, not as a sign of their fellowship, but as a *means creative of a fellowship* that did not exist. And, if anyone would understand the Holy Communion aright, it must be in this light of a creative act and not as a climax of fellowship otherwise obtained. This point needs stressing, as many, by sheer use, and lack of serious thought, accept the climax idea as axiomatic. It certainly is not capable of proof. Bishop Hind, of Fukien, was one of the first to emphasize this aspect in his article on intercommunion in the *Nineteenth Century Review* for October, 1922. The article is well worth study. I quote one sentence only: "May we not fairly think that our Lord, foreseeing the possibilities of breaches of fellowship within His Church, gave them this great corporate service as a means of preserving union or of recovering it if lost."

Six years later, after continued experiment, the Bishop is still urging the same course: "Conference, discussion, conversations, these things are good, but they can never achieve union; it is not to be gained by such mechanical means, it is a biological process. The Communions have to fall in love with one another, and this can only be done by close contact, and the deliberate getting rid of old prejudices and superiority complexes. I hope that before very long we shall see a much wider use of such methods as exchange of pulpits, mutual intercommunion, formal recognition of ministries. These are the steps which we must take in order to set free those spiritual forces which will bring us all unto unity of the Faith and of the Son of God, unto a perfect man and unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." (From a sermon preached in Shanghai Cathedral, April 29, 1928.)

Lastly, let us think of the object of the institution. It centred round the death of our Lord, which the disciples were slow to accept or foresee. The conception of sharing in the life of a god was common amongst the peoples of the earth, but the death of the god, a *willing death* for his people, was an idea not known and hard to assimilate. Moreover, with it is connected the idea that the disciple should associate himself in a similar sacrifice, an idea almost impossible to attain. And in order that this central contribution of Christ to the world's life should ever be before the minds of men He instituted this ceremony that should remind them of His willing death, of His death for His people, of His death which was to be the example to each disciple in self-sacrifice. After His resurrection, when His death was realized to be the way of life and His sacrificed body and shed blood were realized to be alive, then most naturally into this memorial and emphasis

of His death was added the more common idea of sharing in the life of the god. And we rejoice to be able to combine these two ideas in one service. The imported idea brings with it its priesthood and priestcraft, the original idea demands neither. And while an ordered service and an appointed body of men for conducting it is right and useful for a reverent continuation of the rite, it never was, never has been, never will be necessary to the act as a spiritual force. This is duly recognized by the statement made at Lambeth, 1920, recognizing the spiritual validity of the duly appointed ministers of any Church :

“ It is not that we call in question for a moment the spiritual reality of the ministries of those communions which do not possess the Episcopate. On the contrary, we thankfully acknowledge that these ministries have been manifestly blessed and owned by the Holy Spirit as effective means of grace.” (*Lambeth 1920 Report*, pp. 134-5) ;

and also by the Bishop of Manchester in his presidential address to the Manchester diocesan conference and officially reported in the diocesan magazine of last November, in which he writes :

“ I must go further than that. I am very anxious on this occasion, whilst making it plain that the opinion is my own, to convey it to you as my personal opinion for you to consider. *If we really think about it*, we must, I believe, come to the conclusion that not only a Free Church Minister but any layman who should, devoutly and not defiantly, decide that it is right for him to celebrate the Holy Communion would effect a real consecration and through it the real gift would be given. For I believe that the limitation of the celebration to the Priesthood, which is of the highest value for maintaining the full meaning of the service and keeping it alive before the minds of men, so that they expect the fullness of God's gift and, as they expect, receive it, is none the less a rule of discipline. *There is nothing, so to speak, in the nature of things which makes it impossible for any but Priests to celebrate and administer a real sacrament.* At the same time the circumstances which could make it right for a layman of our Church to violate so fundamental a rule of discipline are so rare as to be negligible. Why the rule of discipline is so important I have already tried to show. This, therefore, is not a matter of great practical importance, but it affects the principle, and I want to put my whole mind before you.” (Pp. 538-9.)

The same fundamental principle is expressed in his *Christus Veritas*, p. 163.

The conclusion is clear. An exclusive attitude is not in accordance with the mind of Christ. To restrict the sharing in the ceremony to those who are already fully agreed is against the spirit of the first institution ; and to restrict the validity of the sacrament to those priests ordained with certain order and succession on the grounds that they alone can convey grace, is entirely remote from the original conception of the Last Supper, which is to give a meaning to death and not primarily to convey life.

Christians of various Churches have realized the harm that is done by their divisions, even though they have been slow to realize how disastrous and devastating these antagonisms are to Christian work in the mission field. Members of various Churches have met together for discussion from the time of the Reformation onwards, beginning with Leibnitz and Bossuet on to later times at Grindelwald,

in England, at Malines and Lausanne. Attempts have been made to come to a common mind, and reaching a common mind has been made a condition of common fellowship, and no agreement has been reached. And no agreement ever will be reached in this way, for it is fellowship and worship that will produce the common mind and not the common mind that will produce the fellowship. The Bishop of Gloucester, in *The Doctrine of the Church and Reunion*, p. 276, writes: "Does it not suggest that our right solution of the many difficulties which arise must be the acceptance of a common worship, not the formalization of a common doctrine of the Eucharist?" Dr. Hawks Pott, President of St. John's University, Shanghai, in a letter states the position tersely and clearly when he writes: "Instead of making the Sacrament of Holy Communion the decisive factor, we must aim at making it the unifying factor. This, it seems to me, would be in keeping with the mind of Christ. I see no other hope for reunion than intercommunion. It seems to me now we are putting the cart before the horse." It is only when men act in the fellowship of Christ, whom they worship, that their minds will be prepared to think more closely together. Christ did not create a unity amongst His disciples by discussion or a sermon, but by bringing them together in an act, and the Church in her wisdom feels that she can choose a better method, but her wisdom has proved the foolishness of men. It remains for her still to enter into and obey the foolishness of God and find fellowship around the table of the Lord rather than round the table of council. In this we are not dealing merely with theory but with fact. While the Churches as a whole have not viewed with favour any attempts of Christians to come together at Holy Communion except within the narrow borders of their own Church, here and there, individuals, groups, or large bodies of men and women, hearing the call of the Spirit, have refused to be trammelled by bonds which are of man's making and are the result of the traditions of men and have entered into the freedom of fellowship which is the will of Christ. These acts have been many, their result has always been the same. Those who have taken part in them have in the most pronounced sense been conscious of the presence of the Lord Himself and have been drawn the one to the other in a way that appeared little short of miraculous, but which was only the normal working out of the law which our Lord had in mind on that last night.

It is impossible to give a full list of the experiments that have been made and of the results achieved. On the other hand, it is impossible to leave out special cases of individual communions at great conferences or of those others, where, through a course of years, an experiment has been well tested. Intercommunion, as defined at the outset, has been the rule in the Fukien diocese for years; the same spirit inspires the rising Church of Persia. An experiment along these lines was made in Ceylon at the Training Colony, Peradeniya, in which the C.M.S. and W.M.M.S. are federated for training purposes; also at the Prince of Wales' College at

Achimota, and at countless conferences, where a spirit of unanimity could not be reached, after a meeting round the table of the Lord a complete and sudden agreement has come upon them. Of the many one could instance, I would mention the Y.W.C.A. Conference at Budapest in this year. Last July, driven by the Spirit, the Keswick Convention celebrated a joint communion, the Rev. F. B. Meyer (a Baptist minister) celebrating, the post-communion being taken by Dr. Stuart Holden. But perhaps the greatest example of the Holy Spirit urging men to a trustful experiment on the principle laid down by Christ was at the Jerusalem Conference this March. It has been said that at no time in the world's history has a more œcumenical conference been held, and there, after a fortnight of meeting together, they felt driven to an act of intercommunion on Easter Sunday. Of the two hundred and forty delegates two hundred and twenty participated. Of our Anglican delegates twenty-two out of twenty-seven were present, including at least one bishop, and all received the elements. This service was conducted by a Methodist bishop from America, assisted by a canon of our Church of England, a Presbyterian, and a Baptist. Those who were present speak of it with faces tense with emotion, living over once again the inexpressible sense of fellowship with those who like themselves were seeking to enter more deeply into the spirit of the Master. Bishop Linton of Persia writes, referring to the intercommunion services: "For those of us who had the joy of sharing in that solemn act of fellowship, Jerusalem 1928 was a milestone on the journey towards that oneness for which our Blessed Lord prayed. Keswick 1928 is the second milestone."

On all hands we hear of the vindication of the principle of Christ when He laid down that the Communion should be the creative means of unity and not the crowning flower in its consummation. Such acts do not imply that all who partake have come to an agreement as to the meaning of the service, as to the right form of administration, as to what is primary and what is secondary in the sacrament; but it does imply a recognition of two things. First, that all are genuinely seeking to know Christ and His will and to follow His example and that none as yet have found the full and perfect way. It implies, secondly, a full recognition by all that the others, too, are genuinely seeking and that none have yet found the perfect goal. This is only carrying over into the problem of Holy Communion the same spirit we already practise with regard to such questions as the atonement, inspiration, revelation, and many other doctrines. It follows from this attitude that intercommunions must be mutual. We must both give and receive invitations, both administer communion to recognized members of other Churches and receive the elements from the hand of their appointed ministers. With a generosity which has often been to me a marvel of Christian grace, during all the conferences and conversations our nonconformist brethren in Christ have been ready to accept our invitations to them to communicate with us.

For a quarter of a century this act of trust has been made by them in the hope that it would draw us together. But we have officially stood aloof and refused the invitations to communicate with them. It is only natural that now they should ask us definitely to make the intercommunion mutual lest their love be taken for weakness. The day for merely inviting non-Anglicans is past. We must be true to our convictions and boldly unite with them as occasion arises in the creative act of fellowship. As Canon Woods has said in this connection, "It is time to fling timidities away and gird ourselves to meet the Day of the Lord."

We have thus, on the one hand, theories of Holy Communion and theories of the Church which have failed to produce a real sense of fellowship; on the other hand we have the fact that more and more, especially in these last few months and years, those who have courageously, not in their own strength but driven by the Spirit, made experiment of the way of Christ, have found a fellowship and unity beyond their wildest dreams and expectations.

Does this not point to the fact that what is demanded of us is action, experimental action? The Church cannot legislate over and above the experience of its members. It is as impossible for bishops as for kings to make laws for which their people are not prepared and whose good has not been proved. Laws are made on the experiences of men, and the laws of the Church and the regulation of intercommunion amongst the Churches can only be made as a result of the experiments of those who know that they must first of all obey God and not man. In this connection I would quote the Bishop of Bradford from his sermon at the anniversary of the C.M.S. "As a matter of fact nearly all the advance towards the greater unity which now exists between the Churches has come from brave experiments on new lines. . . . These things have all shocked the ecclesiastical world, but unity has made progress." Then, after pressing the point that intercommunion is creative of unity, he continues: "I wonder if it is not just here that we might find a new starting-point for that fresh adventure to which it seems God is now calling us, and go boldly forward to intercommunion, not careful overmuch about offending others, if we are clear God's will may be done along the lines of Christ's own example."

It is necessary at this point to make one thing clear beyond any vestige of doubt. Acts of intercommunion must not be rushed into as if they merely of themselves were a cure-all. If one would hope to share the marvellous experiences of those who have found their fellowship in this way, there must be the trouble taken to prepare the ground. When the ground is prepared by co-operation in social, religious or other work then the Spirit will begin to urge that at the Lord's Table the fruit can be best grown. Or it may be that in conferences or fraternals a spirit of rivalry or misunderstanding may arise. Then is the time to find a new peace and fellowship in the way appointed by our Lord. But be it for the emphasis of fellowship or the restoration of fellowship, the

preliminary basis must be a drawing together as children of God. Only, when the Spirit moves, let no one, in the name of order or tradition, dare to resist. Quench not the Spirit.

Some readers may feel that they find difficulties in action of this kind : they are not accustomed to it. But let them remember that material forms, however much we appreciate them and reverence them, must not interfere with the deeper things of the Spirit. When we go for communion to other Churches, it does not imply that we fully agree with them or that we prefer their service to ours, or that we intend to forsake our own Church for theirs ; but it does imply and it helps to express that we and they are after one quest, are seeking one inspiration and are striving together, despite our divisions, to enter afresh into that most desperately hard thought that the way of victory is through self-sacrifice, and that except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die it abideth alone. In such a quest we need all the fellowship that Christians can give one to the other, and, if there still linger in some a conscious or unconscious pride of the historicity, age and prestige of their own Church, let them realize that what is true of individuals is true of Churches, and that the life of a Church, even as of an individual, is through the way of self-sacrifice. Our Church will only find her soul when she knows how to lose it for Christ's sake and the Gospel's, and we shall never help her to find her soul if we, as part of her, live only in pride of her.

In conclusion let me quote from a private letter of the Bishop of Fukien, which exactly illustrates the power of action to overcome countless theoretical objections :

" I had an interesting experience some years ago, at our hill station during the summer vacation, when a certain Bishop of our Church had been invited to speak at the Annual Convention on the hills. His addresses were most helpful and were much appreciated by all those (of several different Communion) who were gathered there. He came to me one day and said, ' I have been asked to preach at the Union Communion Service on Sunday. What do you think about it ? ' I said, ' I can tell you at once what I think. If you feel you can remain and partake at the Communion with the rest, then by all means preach ; if you feel you cannot partake, then I advise you to stay away altogether. ' He said that he had never partaken at a non-Anglican Communion in his life. I replied that I had, and that I expected to be present on Sunday. He said he would think it over, and in a few days he came to me and said, ' I have decided to preach on Sunday. ' ' I am glad to hear it, ' said I. I shall not soon forget his radiant face when he came out from the service on Sunday, as he took my arm and exclaimed that he never could have believed that it was possible to get such a happy sense of Love and Fellowship with all God's children during a simple Sunday Service as he had just enjoyed. The experience was plainly a wonderful revelation to him. The Service on that particular Sunday was after a non-Anglican form, and there were certainly some things that might have been expected to grate on one not accustomed to the experience, but he seemed quite unconscious of these, and was plainly uplifted and helped by the whole adventure.

" Now what I want to know is this. Is there any authority in the Church of God which has the right to deny to the children of God a spiritual experience such as that ? I have no difficulty in answering the question. And it is with real sorrow that I feel that the half of our Communion is living in ignor-

ance of the communion of the Saints, in which they say they believe, because they are scared off from making such adventures by warnings of dangers and pitfalls which do not in fact exist. It is said that, for the sake of the weaker brethren, we ought to hold our hands in this matter. Who are these weaker brethren? Are they the Romanists? or the Anglo-Catholics? But to hold our hand seems to me to be to acquiesce in their weakness and to fail in pointing out to them the direction in which they are most likely to find strength."

The assurance with which some modern critics assert the impossibility of the Johannine authorship of the Fourth Gospel is in itself a challenge to a fresh examination of their arguments. The Rev. H. P. V. Nunn, M.A., has undertaken such an examination in *The Son of Zebedee and the Fourth Gospel* (S.P.C.K., 2s. 6d. net), and makes some searching criticisms of the statements of several recent commentators, who are convinced that John the son of Zebedee was martyred early in life and therefore could not be the author of the Fourth Gospel. He shows that much of the evidence on which this view is based has not been sufficiently tested. More careful scrutiny, he is convinced, shows that it is inadequate to support the theory based on it. In a second essay he examines still further the statements of Dr. Stanton and Canon Streeter and the writings of Strauss and Harnack and again finds them unsatisfactory and incomplete. Bishop Temple commends Mr. Nunn's work, and says that he found Canon Streeter's treatment of the Fourth Gospel "below the level of the rest," and that Mr. Nunn supplies materials for judgment on it.

What remains of the Old Testament and other Essays, by Hermann Gunkel, translated by the Rev. A. K. Dallas, M.A. (George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 6s. net), is a statement of the value of the Old Testament in the eyes of the Higher Critic. In addition to the essay which gives its title to the volume, it also treats of Fundamental Problems of Hebrew Literary History, the Religion of the Psalms, the close of Micah, and Jacob. Dr. James Moffatt in a Preface speaks of the rare combination of wisdom and learning and the religious sympathy which characterize Prof. Gunkel's work. We admire the beauty of much of the Professor's thought, and the value of the lessons which he draws from the Old Testament; but in spite of his emphasis on the great treasure which he sees in it, we feel that there is something more of the direct revelation of God which he passes over too lightly. While we are grateful for the eloquence and enthusiasm, the insight and learning with which these lessons of the Old Testament are drawn out, we look for something more, something that might be indicated as the inspiration that points onward to Christ.