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INTER-COMMUNION.

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IT is a great joy for one who has been closely watching the progress of Inter-Communion during the last fifteen years to be asked to address the Cheltenham Conference, that has always shown such great sympathy for the idea of reunion. Moreover, it is especially pleasing to speak at a time when those who have eyes to see realize that the great tide of Inter-Communion has begun to flow, and that by the Grace of God this barrier which has in the past proved one of the greatest bulwarks against the possibility of reunion is about to be swept away.

In connection with the whole question it is right that we should first of all come to a clear understanding as to what we believe was the *object* of our Lord in instituting this Sacrament. If we hold that it was to be the crown of an already consummated spiritual, emotional and intellectual unity, then naturally we shall feel that the time is not yet ripe for acts of Inter-Communion; but if we are convinced, as I feel we must be, that our Lord instituted the rite as a *means to attain* that which could be attained in no other way, then with humility we shall confess that for centuries we have been trying to reach His goal by devious paths of our own, and neglected to follow His clear leading. I have worked this point out in an article in *THE CHURCHMAN* for January, 1929, which is being reprinted in pamphlet form. I need only here sum up by saying that the state of mind of the disciples at the Last Supper, if we think it out, will be seen to be one of trepidation and excitement and mutual suspicion, and rivalry, and that this was the cause of their sitting down to the Supper with unwashed feet. This led our Lord to do for them what they would have done for themselves had one of their number been ready in Eastern-wise to see that a bucket of water was at the door for them to cleanse their feet before entering after their walk. The shared bread and wine were, among other things, to bring them once again into the spirit of fellowship through the spirit of sacrifice.

I take it then that we start from the basis of the Holy Communion being a means to an end, the means appointed by our Lord to draw disintegrating Christians together. Before proceeding, I would make another point clear.

A quarter of a century ago, Free Churchmen, with a wonderful Christian charity, were willing to accept invitations to our Celebrations without asking us back to theirs, because they felt that if they came to us we should, by a natural Christian process, be led to communicate with them in their churches. Experience has shown that they were wrong, and they are now naturally hesitating to accept our invitations, unless in them is implied the willingness to accept an invitation in return. I feel that they are right, and

therefore in speaking of Inter-Communion I shall assume that we mean, not only receiving Free Churchmen at our celebrations, but being ready to communicate in their churches. For those who seek authority for such action, Bishop Linton, of Persia, rightly points out that it is fully implied by the recognition by Lambeth 1920 of the spiritual reality of non-Episcopal ministries not only of the Word but of the Sacraments. One other point I would mention. Inter-Communion may mean a mutual and joint *reception*, or it may mean a joint *administration*. Spiritually, I believe both these to be in the same plane, and that they could on spiritual grounds be treated as one, but the question of joint administration does not lead one any farther in spiritual principles, and is open to the serious practical objection that it introduces new problems of the Ministry and Church Order. I look forward to the day of joint administrations, but do not feel that anything will be gained by pressing for these at this point. When mutual reception is largely recognized, then we may move on to joint administrations, but in the meanwhile many may be alienated by the second who are yet growingly prepared to accept the first. This is a point in which we must remember those who move more slowly, and, while I always rejoice to hear of joint administrations having taken place, I do not propose in this lecture to press for this form of Inter-Communion, nor will I refer to it again.

In dealing with the whole problem, there are certain facts which I would like to lay before you :—

(1) I accept the fact that our Lord instituted a rite at the Last Supper, and that the disciples understood Him correctly when they reproduced it in memory of Him.

(2) That at the institution there was no mention of any Ministry, and that no orders were given about administration. This entirely agrees with our Lord's general habit of mind. For Him fact always transcended form, and was greater than interpretation. Questions of ministry and order cannot therefore be fundamental.

(3) In the course of time there arose within the Church a sacerdotal Ministry, which replaced the words of our Lord "where two or three are gathered together, there am I in the midst of them," with the words "where there is no Bishop, there is no Church." The Church of England has never been party to such a sacerdotal destruction of the simple Christian faith. Nowhere in the Articles, whether we look at those which deal especially with the Church, Numbers 19, 20 and 36, or with those that deal with the Sacraments, Numbers 25, 27 and 28, do we find a single word that would make one believe that a Bishop is *necessary* for the existence of the Christian Church.

(4) I would bring to your memory the facts at the Reformation, and how, as Mr. Carter points out in his book, *The Anglican Via Media*, ministers of the Reformed Church without episcopal ordination were licensed to celebrate the Offices and administer the Sacraments without further ordination (pages 96 and 97), and that Bishop Cosin urged the English refugees in France to join in Com-

munion with the French Reformed Church. He himself communicated at Charenton. The retention of Bishops at the Reformation depended on the attitude of the Bishops—not on their necessity to the Church.

(5) The next fact that we have to face is the rise of the whole problem in the mission field. Here in England Christians can normally find a church of their own for Communion, and this has blinded men to the need for Christian unity in face of growing secularism, but in the mission field, especially through the working of the comity of missions by which only one Church works in a given area, it constantly arises that when a convert leaves one district for another, he comes into the sphere of an entirely different Christian Church. The problem has thus become acute. (Kikuyu, S.I.U.C., Persia, China, Bishop Hind in Fukien.) From the end of last century discussions and conferences have taken place in order to try and reach some agreement, and a great step forward is reached when the Lambeth Conference in its Report, page 135, states that they do not for a moment question the spiritual reality of the Ministries of those Communions which do not possess the Episcopate. On the contrary, they say, we thankfully acknowledge that these Ministries have been manifestly blessed and owned by the Holy Spirit as effective means of grace. All such theories are abundantly substantiated by the spiritual results that have been reached by those who, obeying our Lord's command, have not hesitated to enter into the privilege and inspiration of Inter-Communion. Whether we think of Grindelwald in earlier days, or, more recently, the wonderful Communion Service held by the Jerusalem Conference on Easter Day, or the Bishop of Liverpool's invitation to the whole Student Movement Quadrennial Conference at the beginning of this year, or of the special blessing of unanimity at the Y.W.C.A. Conference at Budapest, or whether we think of the long-tested experiment at Peradeniya, where Inter-Communion brought such an abundant blessing, in every case we are presented with a sudden and continued outburst of spiritual power, a drawing together of men not only in spirit but in mind and will. A new atmosphere is created in which things happen which normally are regarded as impossible. The long experience in this matter of the Bishop of Fukien is of extraordinary weight and value, and I trust as he is present he will tell us first hand of his experience.

In contradistinction to these experiences, which have vindicated our Lord's method for attaining unity, we turn to what the Bishop of Bradford rightly calls the tragedy of Lausanne. There, as Mr. Pulvertaft said, Lausanne opened with a vision which day by day got more completely obscured, whereas Jerusalem ended with a brightness and a glory which was the outcome of a growing insight into the mind of our Lord.

From the spiritual standpoint there is no problem at all. Those who obey find ample proof that our Lord chose not only a good but the only method which would draw all men unto Himself.

There are, however, certain problems which may arise in men's

minds with regard to practical matters. The first of these is the meaning of the Confirmation rubric that "there shall none be admitted to the Holy Communion, until such time as he be confirmed, or be ready and desirous to be confirmed." I cannot do better than give you the conclusions marshalled in convincing style by Dr. Gwatkin, in his Kikuyu Tract of 1914, on this subject :—

In the first place, we find prefixed to the Prayer Book this declaration : "In these our doings we condemn no other nations nor prescribe anything but to our own people only." That the rubric has this sentence in mind is substantiated by the words used being, not "except he be confirmed," but "until such time as he be confirmed"; this latter is the correct form of words if we are thinking of our own people only. Dr. Gwatkin then mentioned that the rubric was framed in 1549 and 1552, except for the last sentence, at a time when the reformers not only received unconfirmed foreigners to Communion, but had no scruples, when abroad, at taking the stronger step of receiving Communion themselves in Calvinistic Churches, and though the present form of the rubric dates from 1662, we must remember that "Cosin was a typical Caroline, and he was not the only one who joined without scruple in the Communion of the French Protestants at Charenton." But the most convincing argument of all is, perhaps, that for many years nonconformists occasionally came to the Communion, and were even expected to do so. This action of theirs led to occasional Conformity Bills during a struggle which lasted for nearly twenty years in the early 18th century, and even these Bills do not dispute the nonconformists' right to Communion, and Dr. Gwatkin remarks : "Strange to say, nobody seems to have discovered that all this trouble might have been avoided by simply carrying out the rubric"! The point is that the rubric was never understood in the sense of excluding nonconformists till long after the rise of Tractarianism. Archbishops Tait, MacLagan and Benson, Bishops Creighton, Stubbs and Wordsworth all rejected the new Tractarian interpretation. As Bishop Wordsworth said, "It is the Lord's Table, not ours." The Confirmation rubric can only prove a difficulty to those who are already convinced and intend to give no weight either to history or to free Christian thinking. The attitude of Dr. Gwatkin is confirmed by Resolution 12, C. 2, of the Lambeth Conference, 1920.

A second difficulty often mentioned is that of the priest's vows that he will only take services according to the Anglican use, and it is because of this that I hesitate to plunge for joint administration of Holy Communion, but there is not anything to prevent a priest celebrating an Anglican service and communicating non-conformists, nor is there anything to prevent his receiving Holy Communion himself at a service conducted by a Free Churchman. It might possibly be replied that the statement in the Lambeth Resolutions 12, B. 2, made this impossible, and that statement is : "and that it should be regarded as the *general* rule of the Church that Anglican communicants should receive Holy Communion only

at the hands of ministers of their own Church or Churches in communion therewith"; but I have myself been told by the Bishop, who insisted on the introduction of the word "general," that the word was introduced with the express object of preventing the rule from becoming universal, as he was thinking of special cases in his own missionary diocese, where it was necessary for some of his Anglican flock, if they wished to receive Communion at all, to receive it from the hands of non-episcopally ordained men. We see, then, that the so-called practical, official difficulties do not really exist, and difficulties that remain must find their cause in our own hearts. These difficulties may take the form of fear of new custom, and lack of precedent, for we know how terribly bound we become by the things to which we are used, and how hard it is to do some new thing; or it may be a subconscious pride of Churchmanship and a desire to hold on to that which gives us prestige; but if all personal difficulties are overcome, and all fear of the criticism of those who object to what we do is destroyed, then we may boldly go forward in this matter. I would quote to you from the words of the Bishop of Bradford in his anniversary sermon of the Church Missionary Society in 1928: "Can we not go boldly forward, with Inter-Communion first, where the spirit of unity is evident. . . . I wonder whether it is not just here that we might find a new starting-point for that fresh adventure to which it seems God is calling us, and go boldly forward to Inter-Communion, not careful over-much about offending others if we are clear that God's Will may be done along the line of Christ's own example."

I would close with a few practical suggestions with regard to immediate action. Acts of Inter-Communion must be the result of a certain Christian fellowship, being in Christ together, even though it may be far from complete unanimity in any particular direction, emotional, intellectual or doctrinal. And I would here throw out the suggestion that we have in *our common failure* a real call to corporate action. We are all genuinely trying to mould our churches after a supposed Christ pattern and we have failed. Surely this in itself is enough to draw us together to the Sacrament of the Cross. Dwelling on our contributions may lead to pride and exclusiveness, a true sense of humiliation will draw us together. Mere formal and unprepared general schemes of Inter-Communion are not likely to be helpful; the most profitable times for such acts would therefore be when small groups have met together for fellowship and discussion and even controversy. At such times a joint act of Communion will prove of tremendous power in drawing minds, wills and hearts together. The act of partaking in common need not mean any special unanimity of interpretation of doctrine (in passing let us note how differences of interpretation of the Incarnation, for instance, do not separate us nor, *within our Church*, those *re* the Holy Communion) or corporate preference for certain forms of ceremony (which appertain to custom and inherited prejudice), they are of the accidents, not the substance, but is a witness to the near fellowship which exists in

Christ Jesus, despite these very differences of form and thought. We have in Cambridge such Inter-Communion now year by year in a Society composed of groups of men from all the Theological Colleges. Such acts do not imply carelessness concerning, or loose attachment to, our own branch of the Church. Other opportunities for acts of Inter-Communion are special national days, when Christians naturally are gathered together. A United Communion, say on New Year's Day, or Empire Day, or Armistice Day, is a thing which all of us should work for, and if such services take place before Lambeth 1930, it will enable the Bishops to discuss problems of Reunion, not *in vacuo*, but on the basis of the expressed will of the Churches and the proved experiences of spiritual blessing. Another method is the increased use of the general invitation in all our Churches, especially in one-church areas, in chaplaincies, in camps and Conferences, to all those who are regular communicants of their own Churches to join with us in this great act of fellowship in Our Lord's Life and Death; but I would press the thought with which I began, that where such invitation is given it must, if it is to be of any Christian value, include a stated or implied willingness to communicate at the churches of those whom you thus invite. It was with great joy that I heard the other day that the members who compose a Cathedral Chapter unofficially gave an invitation to nonconformist ministers to attend an Anglican Celebration, and themselves later accepted the invitation to receive at a Free Church in their turn. It is by such acts as these, fearless, bold, expectant, and perhaps above all obedient to the command of Our Lord, that this great barrier to true understanding and fellowship will be once and for all banished from our Christian thinking, and I look forward to the day, not so far ahead, when such questions will seem as irrelevant to the Christians of the time as that which loomed so important in the eyes of the nascent Church at Jerusalem, namely, whether or not one could even think of entering the Christian brotherhood without first having gone through a form of surgical operation!

But this demands individual action (the time is not yet ripe for officially approved acts)—prayerfully, fearlessly, obedient to a heavenly vision. My final word is a plea for actual Inter-Communion, whenever the occasion arises—and our eyes must be open to see opportunities—even at real cost to ourselves. For a long time our courtesy in withholding from such action on account of those who conscientiously object, has now been interpreted as weakness due to lack of conviction. We can respect their aloofness but can no longer allow it to deter us. Let us, in the Bishop of Bradford's words already quoted, “be not careful over-much of offending others.” While naturally this is the last thing we seek to do, if we are clear that God's will may be done by following Christ's own example, our duty is to follow the truth and not be led even by an old established rut that goes in another direction.