

Inter-communion

or

Shall the Family Feast Together ?

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I

THE meaning of the term Inter-communion is, I take it, liberty to members of two or more churches to participate as recipients at the Holy Communion services of the other churches, either freely, or subject to certain conditions. The term might conceivably be used to include participation as officiant also, but seems ordinarily not to bear that more extensive meaning.

The implication of the term is clearly that the churches concerned are separate churches, each one acknowledging the others more or less stiffly or cordially as true churches, i.e., as really part of Christ's Body. This position amounts to a federation of separate churches each of which is a distinct entity.

Such a position is quite different from, e.g., the position of the proposed S. India Church, which is intended to incorporate the uniting churches into one regional church, every member of which, both ordained and lay, is to enjoy full rights as such in the one united church, although uniformity of worship and of mode of ordination of the original ministry will not prevail at first. There will therefore be full communion, not inter-communion, from the very outset in the S. India Church and this will apply to officiants as well as to recipients.

¹ The Anglican Evangelical Group Movement has provided outlines for the study of this subject. Corporate sense suggests that we should use them, and the writer gratefully acknowledges the valuable guidance they afford.

Picture next three possibilities :

- (a) One Church like the future S. I. Church in which there is communion as an inherent right to all within the one church, officiants as well as recipients ;
- (b) a federation of churches permitting inter-communion to recipients ;
- (c) a number of churches within the same area, e.g., England, not allowing inter-communion at all.

The last and poorest of the three is the lamentable position still prevailing in England while the young churches of India are about to exemplify to us the first and best.

Before we turn to the theological differences (odious term !) which still hinder Inter-communion in this year of grace, let us notice a refreshing and simple matter. Most Free Churches welcome to Holy Communion any professing Christians who desire to come. That seems to the writer the only sound Christian attitude to adopt as between men and women who expect to meet in the life of the world to come, and are already practising members of Christ's Church Militant here on earth. Our rule that we may not actually refuse anyone who presents himself unless he is an open and notorious evil liver, or is in hatred and enmity with another, or is a member of a recognized heretical body, but that we may not invite members of other churches, is much stiffer and colder. In fact, it is in a totally different category and must be an offence and hindrance to the church unity so urgently needed.

II

We will now consider the theological differences which hinder Inter-communion, and the viewpoints of different parties within our own Church.

The main hindrances appear to be :

- (1) the contention that a priest with " valid orders " is essential to the administration of Holy Communion ;
- (2) contentions as to what is requisite for what are called " valid orders," sub-dividing into further contentions

- as regards (a) what is either "the" or "a" true church and (b) the mode of ordination ;
- (3) contentions as to the meaning and effect of the Consecration Prayer.

Incidental and temperamental hindrances exist too, of course, e.g., the type of service, posture of recipient, hour of service, and the plea for fasting attendance.

The Free Churches of England are not trammelled by such proud claims as those just mentioned, and are therefore in a favourable position for negotiation towards Union as well as Inter-communion. Many of us think that such a beginning at home is the natural and best practical policy, and we do not fear that relations with these churches would prejudice later negotiation with the older churches, for no negotiation with them can succeed till they are ready to abandon their arrogant and exclusive claims.

Points of view within our own church are in great contrast. The Evangelical delights in Bishop Lightfoot's *Dissertation on the Christian Ministry*, the opening paragraph of which runs :

"The Kingdom of Christ, not being a Kingdom of this world, is not limited by the restrictions which fetter other societies, political or religious. It is in the fullest sense free, comprehensive, universal. It displays this character, not only in the acceptance of all comers who seek admission, irrespective of race or caste or sex, but also in the instruction and treatment of those who are already its members. It has no sacred days or seasons, no special sanctuaries, because every time and every place alike are holy. *Above all it has no sacerdotal system.* It interposes no sacrificial tribe or class between God and man, by whose intervention alone God is reconciled and man forgiven. Each individual member holds personal communion with the Divine Head. To Him immediately he is responsible, and from Him directly he obtains pardon and draws strength."

The Evangelical believes, too, as Article 29 puts it, that the Church exists where the pure Word of God is preached and the Sacraments be duly administered. He believes Our Lord's words, "By their fruits ye shall know them," and that a church producing Apostolic fruits, as all

the great Free Churches are evidently doing, must be part of the Apostolic Church. He believes, as Dean Inge said, that the Apostolic Succession is in the Saints, the whole church, not only in a part of it. He places no reliance upon a physical continuity of the Ministry "as it were in a golden channel," nor does he cling to any such thing for the future, but rather believes, as Archbishop Whately put it (*Apostolic Succession Considered*, p. 95), that in rough ages, irregularities vitiating strict legal succession, are certain to have occurred from time to time, so that in fact no formal Apostolic Succession of Orders is likely to exist and certainly could not be relied upon. He welcomes too, the words of the judicious Hooker, "Neither God's being Author of laws for the government of His Church, nor His committing them unto Scripture, is any reason sufficient wherefore all Churches should be forever bound to keep them without change . . . Matters of ecclesiastical polity are not so strictly or everlastingly commanded in Scripture, but that unto the complete form of Church Polity much may be requisite which the Scripture teacheth not, and much which it hath taught become unrequisite, sometime because we need not use it, sometime also because we cannot (Ecclesiastical Polity, Book III, chapters x, xi).

To sum up the Evangelical's point of view—while fully recognizing the need for a duly authorized ministry, he smiles at the idea that any particular form of it—a *fortiori* that any special mode of transmitting it—is of the *esse* of the church, and so is in a favourable position to negotiate with other churches.

The Anglo-catholic adopts quite a different point of view, leading to quite different results. Though unable any longer either to deny that the Preface to the Ordinal goes too far or to claim that the threefold ministry can be traced back to New Testament times, he still clings to the idea that Episcopacy is of the essence of the Church and that consequently a non-episcopal body is not part of the Church, and that its sacraments cannot be valid. He cannot see that the Levitical Priesthood failed and that the High Priest, who offered Himself on the Cross as the one full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world was not of the Levitical Order at all, but was of the Order of Melchisedec, as the author of

the epistle to the Hebrews magnificently expresses it. His splendid zeal for solidarity and continuity mis-leads the Anglo-catholic into a craving for a physical connection with the Jewish Church. So he adopts a simple and logical conception, devastatingly fascinating and easy to understand, fatally divisive in its effects, serving no useful purpose at all, definitely without a particle of support from anything in our Blessed Lord's recorded teaching or even that of any Apostle, and seeming to many wholly inconsistent with and miserably repugnant to the spiritual nature of Christ's Kingdom and all He taught.

This type of churchmanship has gone much further. Completely passing over Our Lord's teaching, and example in action, that they that are whole need not a physician but they that are sick, it firmly refuses to admit even well-meaning and good-living members of what it deems imperfect churches to that fellowship which would most help them! This error is surely clear in another way. In the Prayer of Humble Approach we acknowledge in the course of every Holy Communion service that we do not come trusting in our own righteousness. This surely includes all technical, legalistic claims about Orders, and reveals once again the completely false line adopted.

The Central Churchman, I suppose, while not holding the legalistic ideas of the Anglo-catholic as to Church and Priesthood quite so strongly, nevertheless believes in some analogy of the Levitical rule for the Jewish Priesthood, that Episcopal ordination creates a sort of Priestly caste, certainly that Apostolic Succession is in the threefold ministry, that our orders are valid in that sense and should by all means be preserved by insistence upon Episcopal ordination.

Abstention from Inter-communion by a Liberal Anglo-catholic as an act of penance for division might perhaps be respected as a noble scruple. On the other hand it would tend to perpetuate the very division it rightly deploras.

III

We turn next to a consideration of the above differences with reference to the possibility of Inter-communion under certain geographical and other circumstances.

- (a) In a town, several denominations of Free churches are usually represented as well as different types of

Anglican parishes. The present restriction of Inter-communion in such a town inevitably emphasizes the church divisions and the cold and exclusive attitudes of the churches one to another and tends naturally to harden them. In addition, those outside the churches are put off by the obvious lack of brotherly love indicated. Another effect is the hiding of the truth that those Evangelical Anglicans who occasionally communicate in Anglo-catholic churches, but never at Free Church services, are nevertheless in closer spiritual fellowship with the Free churches than with the other branch of what is officially their own church. Inter-communion, if permitted in a town, would unquestionably draw nearer together in spiritual fellowship and practical co-operation individual members of divided churches and the churches themselves, and thus would be a practical step towards the reunion so urgently needed. It would also be a far better witness to the world of brotherly love than at present prevails.

- (b) In a single parish area there are often members of the Free churches who use some of our services because distance prevents attendance at their own. Inter-communion under such circumstances would, if permitted freely, often lead to Free Churchmen becoming members of our church for all practical purposes, and where it did not lead to so much as that, it would certainly draw the individuals, and to some extent the churches concerned, into closer spiritual fellowship. Refusal of inter-communion has the opposite deplorable result. I have even known in the Mission Field non-conformist ladies of the Zenana Bible and Medical Mission who regularly prepared their women and girls for confirmation in our church, but were themselves not allowed to communicate, although the C.M.S. missionary would have welcomed them. The Bishop took on himself to forbid it, well knowing they had no church of their own within reach to attend and could not communicate at all for months on end. These ladies none the less with great grace continued preparing girls for confirmation which admitted them to Holy Communion from which their teachers were

debarred. Of course Indian Christians, and probably other nationals, knowing the vast difference between Christians and Muhammadans, Heathen, etc., are completely unconscious of different types of churchmanship within the Church, and use whatever Christian church is available without asking questions when they move from one area to another. The Mission Comity plan ordinarily leads to areas, often the size of two or three English counties or more, being entirely Anglican or Baptist or Methodist-Episcopal, etc. If Indian Christians did not act thus they would often be practically excommunicated for years or even for life. The way they act and are accepted is a very practical example of the beneficent effect of Inter-communion.

- (c) Inter-communion on special occasions such as the Kikuyu Conference and many other inter-denominational Conferences since, up to Tambaram last winter certainly call for mention. Men and women who on such occasions discuss together the world-wide needs, privileges and possibilities of Christ's Church, naturally realize that in Christ there cannot be Greek or Jew, circumcision or uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman, but Christ is all and in all, and they act accordingly. At Tambaram on Christmas day almost all the delegates representing seventy nations joined in a memorable Holy Communion service. The celebrant was the Bishop of Dornakal assisted by five bishops whose respective homelands were: West Africa, China, Japan, Great Britain and the U.S.A. Real spiritual unity attained in the Conference led naturally to this. No Frank Zanzibar has asked the Archbishop of Canterbury to institute a heresy hunt this time! The Anglican rite was used on this occasion just as it was at Kikuyu. The grace shown by other churches in assenting to this might well shame our Church into their Christlike humility. The responsibility of the clergy in the inter-communion question seems infinitely greater than that of the laity. The laity, except a very small percentage indeed of ecclesiastically minded persons, would readily welcome freedom in this matter,

although temperamental differences and habits would probably cause many to prefer the rite as administered in their own churches for a time.

IV

The fourth question "Is Episcopal authority binding in this matter?" seems a little unhappily expressed. No *Jus Liturgicum* or anything else can give a Bishop of our church jurisdiction to abrogate our statutory P.B. or any rubric contained in it. Equally, or *a fortiori*, private judgment cannot justify anyone else doing so. Unquestionably when the rubric at the end of the Confirmation Service was drawn up in 1662 members of our church alone were thought of by the framers of the rubric. Its ancestor, the rubric in the Sarum Manual, prescribed that no one should be admitted to communicate, *save when dying*, except he had been confirmed or had been reasonably hindered from receiving Confirmation. This, the intermediate 1552 rubric, and the present 1662 one, were plainly meant to refer only to Anglicans. There was no such thing as a non-conformist church in 1552 and none were "recognized" in 1662. In fact in 1662 non-communicants were liable to imprisonment for their failure, and some say it can hardly have been intended to frame a rubric to debar persons from doing what general law required them to do, with imprisonment as the penalty for failure. The present writer prefers to avoid so complicated an argument as that.

Professor Gwatkin's exhaustive examination of the history and meaning of the rubric points out (*inter alia*):

- (1) Prefixed to the Prayer Book is this general declaration:

In these our doings we condemn no other nations, nor prescribe anything but to our own people only.

- (2) The Reformers of 1549-52 both admitted unconfirmed Calvinists to Holy Communion, and when abroad, themselves received Holy Communion in their churches.
- (3) In 1662, when the rubric was put into its present form, there had been no Episcopal government in England for twenty years, many were not baptized and hardly any below middle age can have been confirmed. To meet the double situation a form of "Baptism of

such as are of Riper years " was provided, and " or be ready and desirous to be confirmed," was added to the Confirmation rubric.

- (4) This rubric was never understood to exclude non-conformists till long after Tractarianism arose.
- (5) Archbishops Tait, Maclagan and Benson, and Bishops Creighton, Stubbs and Wordsworth refused to accept the Tractarian interpretation.

Happily the rule about not excluding those who come, removes much of the difficulty.

v

Experiments towards securing inter-communion may or might be made in at least two ways :

- (a) By encouraging it at S.C.M., Youth Movement and other Inter-denominational Conferences. This is happily already being done to some extent and seems likely to be extended. To reach the further step of having ministers of other churches as officiants at such services instead of exclusively our own ministers, and not always being tied to the Anglican rite seems very desirable.
- (b) Another experiment would be for a particular parish, or preferably rural deanery, or diocese to arrange with say the Methodist or Presbyterian Church for inter-communion of recipients on the Sunday following Remembrance day each year, and/or on the first Sunday of the year or on say the second Sunday of every month.